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SILVIA BY JULIA KAVANAGH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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S I L V I A.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

AUTHOR OF

"NATHALIE," "ADELE," "DORA," &c.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1870.

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S I L V I A.

CHAPTER I.

THE Captain had often heard of those figurative thunder-bolts which are said to fall on people in cases of sudden calamity, but he had never felt any; all his sorrows and trials, and he had had his share, had come to him slowly, casting long shadows before. The girl he loved had leisurely put him by for a more favoured man; the disease which carried his beloved wife away had been painful and tedious; the desertion of his daughter by her husband had come after a coldness and indifference, which almost made it a release; never, in short, save in the accidents of his soldier's life, and these he would have scorned to reckon, had the Captain known what a thunder-bolt was, till Silvia appeared before him on this evening, pale as death, and with looks so wild, that the Captain's pipe fell from his hand on the flags of the terrace, and was broken there in the fall. His first thought was that some terrible accident had befallen his daughter; but he could not speak, he could not utter one word to frame a question.

Silvia gave him no time.

"Is Mr. Meredith come back?" she asked in a low, quick tone, full of tragic meaning.

"No," answered the Captain.

"Then it is so—it is so!" she cried, clapping her hands in wild grief, "the wretch has murdered him, and his blood is upon him!"

"My God! what do you mean?"

"Do you know who shot at Mr. Meredith? Do you know who destroyed his papers? Do you know who attempted his life and mine yesterday? Do you know who has murdered him to-day? Jean Varot—Jean Varot!" she added, repeating his name in a passion of despair.

"And do you know what you are saying, Mademoiselle Nardi?" cried the Captain, confounded. "Charlie murdered! I'll believe it when I see it—a brave fine fellow, who can fight like a lion. And as for Jean Varot—Mademoiselle Nardi, excuse me—you are dreaming, you have fallen asleep somewhere, and you are dreaming still, you are dreaming."

The Captain laughed as he said it; he had quite recovered his composure, and was half ashamed at having been startled out of it.

This took place on the terrace, but Silvia, whose senses had never been more present than they were then, did not long leave the Captain in the belief that she had been asleep, and was dreaming still. She laid her hand upon his arm, and simply saying, "Come," she led him into the house. The first door they passed by was that leading into Madame de l'Epine's sitting-room; Silvia pushed it open, and, with her hand still on the Captain's arm, she entered it. Closing the door behind her, she said, releasing him,

"You do not believe me—you say I am still dreaming; question me, and see if I am awake, Captain."

All distraction had vanished from her pale face, and the poor Captain, as he gazed upon it, felt as if all solid footing had suddenly failed him, and he were shifting on dreadful quicksands.

"But it can't be!" he cried, and in his agony he let out a terrible soldier-like objurgation; "it can't be! Charlie is not dead, he is only out on some abominable piece of engineering or other. It can't be; I tell you Charlie is a match for a dozen. And as for Jean Varot, I don't know how I could listen to you if you were to say it again, Mademoiselle Nardi."

"Listen," she said; "it is too late to save him, but it is not too late for revenge. Listen, and then do as you will."

And the Captain listened, as Silvia, pale as death, but in rapid, collected speech, told him all she knew. He listened, and, what was more, what was terrible indeed to this true-hearted man, he almost believed her. We all have our gods whom we cherish and worship in the clear sanctuary of our faith. Of his stepson's actual fate the Captain knew nothing; but this he began to know—Jean Varot was the man who had twice attempted Mr. Meredith's life. This man, whom he had loved with the love of a large heart and the generous trust of a noble one, was a cruel traitor. The discovery stunned him; then a revulsion of rage followed.

"The villain!" he stammered, shaking his fist, "the treacherous villain! The serpent, the—the——"

He could say no more; he was shaking like an aspen leaf, for Jean Varot himself, coming up the terrace, deliberately approached the window of the

room in which they were, and looking at Silvia, said composedly:

"Madame bade me ask Mademoiselle to be so kind as to join her near the colonnade. Madame felt too tired to come back."

Silvia's large dark eyes seemed to grow larger still as she looked at this man, stained, as she thought, with Mr. Meredith's blood, and her lips quivered, but she controlled herself.

"Come in," she said imperatively.

He looked at her—he knew what she meant, what was coming; but he obeyed, went round to the door, and entered the room with a sullen, defiant look.

The Captain walked up to him, collared him, and said in a voice choked with rage and grief:

"You villain, you treacherous villain, where is Mr. Meredith? Where is he?"

"Take care, Captain," replied Varot, with an evil look. "I like you, but you know it of old, I will not be handled."

"Let him go," said Silvia, coming forward, and putting out her hand to part the two men; "only let him tell us where he has left Mr. Meredith; there may yet be hope—we may yet save him."

"Captain, I warn you, hands off!" said Varot again.

"Do you threaten me, you traitor?" cried the Captain, exasperated. "Where is Mr. Meredith?—I say where is he?" he added, shaking Varot again.

The man did not answer, but with scarcely an effort he shook off the Captain, and sent him staggering to the other end of the room.

"That is your doing, mamzelle," said Varot, sul-

lenly, as he looked at the Captain, who was obliged to sit down. "What do you mean by setting the Captain against me? Mr. Meredith? What do I know about Mr. Meredith? Am I his keeper? I have not seen him this day, and you are more likely to know where he is than I am."

Silvia bared her arm, and showing him the bandage on her wrist,

"Do you see this?" she said, "and do you think I have forgotten yesterday? I tell you that if you have killed him, as I fear in my heart and soul you have, I shall track the deed home to you; for I know all—all, Jean Varot, Mr. Meredith told me all, and if my testimony can condemn you, it shall."

Jean Varot laughed scornfully.

"To think how young ladies will talk," he said jeeringly. "If a young man wants to make himself out a hero with a wild story they take it all in, and then set honest men by the ears just for pastime. You have done a fine piece of work to-day, mamzelle. You have made me raise my hand against my old Captain. He will not forgive me; and," added Varot, very deliberately, "I will never forgive him having forgotten where his head would have been but for me."

"Mind where your head will be yet," said the Captain, who was recovering gradually, "mind that, Varot."

"Safe on my shoulders till I am in my coffin," replied Varot, turning to the door.

"You shall not go!" cried Silvia, flinging herself before it, "you shall not go till you have told us where he is. You may kill me, but you shall not leave this room till you have told me!"

"'Twould be a pity to kill so pretty a young lady," he replied, with mocking politeness; "but luckily there is no need."

In vain Silvia clung to the door; Jean Varot required no strength to remove her, he grasped, unwillingly perhaps, her wounded arm, and with a cry of pain she drew back. At the same time the door opened, and Mr. Meredith entered the room.

For the first time Jean Varot showed some emotion; he stood still and turned livid.

"Don't let him go, Charlie," cried the Captain; "I know all, don't let the villain go!"

Silvia said nothing, but her brain swam, and she would have fallen if the Captain had not supported her.

"It is nothing," he said, "the poor thing thought that villain had murdered you. Don't let him go!"

"I am not going," replied Varot, with a defiant look at Mr. Meredith, who was too much startled and alarmed at the state in which he saw Silvia to heed it.

By a strong effort she rallied; she left the Captain's side, and sitting down on the nearest chair, she said, vainly endeavouring to control her voice, which faltered till it was almost inaudible:

"Forgive me, Mr. Meredith, but I thought something had happened to you, and I—I told the Captain all."

"Then it is true!" exclaimed the Captain, as amazed and indignant as if he had not believed it all along—"it is true, and Jean Varot is the wretch who shot at you in your study!"

"Yes," said Mr. Meredith after a pause, "he is."
Jean Varot laughed.

"Prove it," he said defiantly.

"And he attempted your life yesterday!" exclaimed the Captain—"he actually did?"

"Yes, he did," said Mr. Meredith again.

And Jean Varot, laughing again, once more uttered the same defiant, "Prove it!"

A very stern meaning passed across Mr. Meredith's face. He took Silvia's arm, and raising it, he showed it to his enemy.

"Do you see this?" he asked, his eyes flashing and his features quivering with indignation and anger. "Do you see it, and do you think I will be patient to the end of time. A year ago I was sitting in my study when you fired at me. I know it to be so, though I have no proof."

"Proof be hanged!" said the Captain, stamping his foot in a rage; "never mind proof, Charlie. Shoot the villain—any jury will acquit you—shoot him, I say!"

"Thank you, Captain," said Varot, with a very bad look. "There must be two to that, you know."

"You entered my study last winter and destroyed my papers, and of that I have no proof," said Mr. Meredith.

Varot laughed without restraint.

"But why don't you shoot him!" cried the Captain in indignant remonstrance.

"Yesterday," continued Mr. Meredith, "you fired a shot meant for me, but which grazed Mademoiselle Nardi's arm! You have saved my life once and attempted it twice. We are more than quits. And since we two cannot, as it seems, live in one spot, it is you, who are in my power, who must go."

"In your power!" said Jean Varot, his green eyes flashing—"in your power!"

"This ball," said Mr. Meredith, taking it out of his pocket as he spoke, "grazed Mademoiselle Nardi's arm yesterday at three o'clock. Five minutes later Thurot, who was working in his vineyard, saw you hiding in a hedge the gun from which it was fired. He was working in his vineyard again this afternoon when you came and fetched it. The man left his work, took a round, and met you near the village. He did not ask you about your gun, but of your own accord you said to him: 'I have been getting my gun mended at Colombes.'"

"You need not shoot him now," said the Captain in great glee, "the villain will go to the galleys as sure as he lives."

Jean Varot said nothing. He had turned lividly pale and clenched his hands convulsively as Mr. Meredith spoke, but he could not answer him one word. Still keeping his eye on the defeated murderer's face, Mr. Meredith said:

"Such mercy as wild beasts deserve you ought to have; but because you saved the Captain's life and mine——"

"He!" interrupted the Captain in great wrath; "why, the villain was in a league with the Arabs all the time. He save your life and mine!"

In the great dramas of life, as in those of the poets, the chief characters alone engross each other. Neither Jean Varot nor Mr. Meredith minded the Captain's words any more than they minded the evening breeze which was passing through the garden flowers.

"I hate you!—I hate you!" gasped Jean Varot.

"You have blasted my life. I tell you that I hate you!"

"Hate away," said Mr. Meredith; "but if you do not go off to Havre to-morrow, and thence sail for America, you may expect hard dealings."

"And leave you here, eh!—leave you here in Saint Rémy!" said Varot, white with rage. "What if I will not?"

"Then look for the galleys."

Varot stared at the floor, gnawing his thin lips; then looking up again, he said very coolly:

"I shall be off to-morrow."

He said no more, but opened the door and walked out. The Captain stared after him, for he had not taken the trouble to shut the door, then looked amazed at his stepson.

"And you let him go thus?" he said. "Are you mad, Charlie?"

"Hush!" hurriedly exclaimed Mr. Meredith. "Joséphine is coming—tell her nothing, not a word. Mademoiselle Nardi, you will not mention this to my sister."

"I shall not," replied Silvia, "but is that man——"

She could say no more; Madame de l'Epine was coming up the steps of the terrace, and now looked in at them smilingly through the window.

"Truant, where have you been all day?" she said, addressing her brother. "What took you to Colombes? Why did you not come back to dinner, and why did you three stay here instead of joining me by the colonnade. Surely Jean Varot delivered my message?"

"Of course he did," said the Captain, looking amazingly cheerful and sprightly. "No man like Jean

Varot for a message; but you see poor Mademoiselle Nardi has nearly fainted: the heat, nothing but the heat of the day."

Madame de l'Epine looked much concerned, and indeed Silvia's pale face was enough to alarm her; she went round to the door, entered the room, and going up to her friend, was full of tender and anxious inquiries.

"What is it?" she asked; "you look as if you had been scared, Silvia; has anything frightened you?"

Silvia tried to laugh.

"What should frighten me here?" she asked in her turn. "I think I shall go up to my room," she added, anxious to escape the looks of involuntary wonder which Madame de l'Epine fastened on her.

But Madame de l'Epine would accompany her to her room, and even sit with her; whilst Silvia, leaning back in the arm-chair by the open window, closed her eyes, and rested her forehead on her hand.

Mr. Meredith was living and unhurt; all the fears and visions in which she had seen him lying dead and murdered had fled before his presence. He was living, that was joy indeed; but it was a joy that was still struggling through the darkness of a great fear, and a bitter grief. Besides, what if Jean Varot's submission were but a feint to reach his aim all the more surely. Oh! if only she could see Mr. Meredith alone, and entreat him to be on his guard! If she only could! The thought added to the fever that had already taken hold of her.

At length she could bear no longer the restraint of Madame de l'Epine's presence.

"I think I must go to bed," she said after a while.

But when Madame de l'Epine left her reluctantly, Silvia only threw herself on the bed dressed as she was, and lay there tossing restlessly the whole night long.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the next morning came Silvia was much too ill to rise. The fever had left her, indeed, but she was so weak and prostrate, that when Madame de l'Epine came to see her, she felt seriously alarmed, and wanted to send for the doctor.

"I will not see him," said Silvia, looking very naughty and obstinate; "I will put my head under the bed-clothes."

"My dear child——"

"I am not a child, and I know what ails me. That nightmare upset me, and I want rest."

Madame de l'Epine did not insist, but soon left the room.

"Oh! if they would but let me have rest," thought Silvia, as the door closed upon her. But it was not to be; Madame de l'Epine had not long been gone, when there came a tap at Silvia's room-door, and almost without waiting for her languid "Come in," Mrs. Groom opened it, and entered the room.

For once Mrs. Groom's presence was not welcome, and Silvia plainly showed it; but Mrs. Groom was not to be daunted.

"Taint no manner of use to shut your eyes at me,

mamzelle," she said bluntly, "I come to rouse you, and rouse you I will."

"I wish you would not," said Silvia, fretfully.

"But I will. You had a fainting fit yesterday, and here is something against all faints."

Silvia opened her eyes, and saw that Mrs. Groom had come armed with a bottle, from which she poured out some clear liquid in a wine-glass. She took it from her hand to get rid of her importunities; then pausing in the act of raising it to her lips, she said abruptly:

"Is that Jean Varot working at the aviary in the garden?"

"Jean Varot is gone," replied Mrs. Groom. "He packed up his traps last night and stole away. He was missed at five this morning, and the news was brought to the Captain, who at once sent word to Madame Varot to come and take care of the inn. My goodness, mamzelle, you are spilling all that stuff on the bed-clothes."

"Madame Varot?" said Silvia, without minding her. "Has Jean Varot got a wife?"

"Why should he not, mamzelle?"

Silvia drank Mrs. Groom's cordial by way of reply. It seemed to operate at once, and, as Mrs. Groom triumphantly remarked, "It made another mamzelle of her in a second." Silvia, indeed, looked quite altered—a bright spot of colour rose to her cheeks, her eyes flashed, and with sudden vivacity she said,

"Sit down, Mrs. Groom, and keep me company. You must," she added, imperatively. "You are not busy—you have nothing to do; besides, I shall faint again if you go away."

Thus menaced, Mrs. Groom sat down, shaking her head at Silvia's naughtiness, and asking, "What she wanted with her?"

"Only to know if you ever feel dull, Mrs. Groom?"

"Ain't got time!" was the dry answer.

"I daresay you like Saint Rémy?" remarked Silvia, half sitting up on one elbow, and looking at her very earnestly.

"I like every place I am in," answered Mrs. Groom, taking a stocking out of her pocket and beginning to darn.

"Or the people?" continued Silvia. "What are they like? I know nothing about them."

Mrs. Groom went on darning.

"But you know them," petulantly resumed Silvia. "What are the Saint Rémiens like, Mrs. Groom?—good-tempered, forgiving, vindictive, &c. &c.?"

Mrs. Groom put down her work, and looked at Silvia pityingly. "So, mamzelle," she said, "you want to know what the people here are like?"

"Yes," replied Silvia, with a breathless look, of which she was not conscious.

"Why, like everybody else," said Mrs. Groom, in evident compassion for Silvia's simplicity. "You don't suppose that there's any difference between men and women all the world over? All alike, mamzelle. All bad, good, and indifferent, mixed up! Some people, when they go abroad, pick out the bad—that's what most on them do—and some pick out the good, and they are all wrong. Abroad and at home it's six of the one and half a dozen of the other. All fond of money, all trying to get it by hook or by crook, all

hating their enemies a great deal more than they love their friends."

Mrs. Groom's broad views rather disconcerted Silvia. She wanted information and got philosophy. Luckily, however, Mrs. Groom was mortal, and had prejudices; for when Silvia, annoyed at her failure, said petulantly,

"So there is nothing about these Saint Rémy people? They are neither good nor bad, neither grateful nor vindictive, and you like them all?"

Mrs. Groom replied, rather shortly,

"I don't dote on them, and I never could abide that Jean Varot, who was always about the house."

"Not like him? Why so, Mrs. Groom?"

"Why is he red-haired?" replied Mrs. Groom, looking injured. "And why does he keep his hair like a fur cap, eh?"

"And is that your only reason?"

"Ain't it enough?" tartly replied Madame de l'Epine's housekeeper. "I always go by outsides, and, what's more, so does everybody. It's outside beauty, or outside goodness, or outside manners—all outsides; only the world won't say so, and pretend they go by insides, which they don't."

"Well, and is not Jean Varot's outside a pleasant one?" perversely insisted Silvia. "Take away his red hair, the man is good-looking, is he not?"

"Good-looking, indeed! Oh! well, what do you call good-looking, mamzelle? I call Mr. Meredith good-looking; and as to that, so did Madame Varot, poor thing! though whether she does so now is more than I can tell."

"Ah! to be sure, that Varot has a wife!" said Silvia, as if she had forgotten it.

"He?" and Mrs. Groom stared. "No, no, he has got no wife. The Madame Varot I mean is his sister-in-law, a little widow, whom Jean Varot did want to marry, but who would have nothing to do with him when it came to the point. Though their bans were published, and all, and the Captain took a world of trouble to get them leave to marry; for he being her brother-in-law, there was trouble about it."

"Where does she live?" asked Silvia, quickly.

"Oh! you never saw her. She keeps out of the way. Why, it is months since I saw Madeleine. Not since the shot was fired at Mr. Meredith in the study, and she went into a dead swoon on seeing the broken pane."

The roof of Silvia's mouth felt parched and dry. A burning sensation invaded her whole being.

"And how did Jean Varot take his rejection?" she asked.

"He looked very surly about it."

"I suppose he is jealous?"

Mrs. Groom nodded.

"Ain't he," she replied, "that's all. You see, Madeleine was as fresh as a rose in June, and she was Madame de l'Epine's maid when her husband died; and she too, poor silly fool, must needs set her heart on Mr. Meredith, like all the rest of them. I do believe he was a little bit smitten with her himself; but I suppose his sister spoke to him. At all events he gave up looking at her, and whilst he was away Madeleine agreed to marry Jean Varot. I believe she hated him, and that he found out what ailed her when she broke off with him. For my part I don't think he ever looked on Mr. Meredith with the same eyes from that day to

this. Though suppose the girl does or did like him, how can he help it, poor gentleman? She's only one of the lot, you know."

Silvia could not speak. She felt stung—stung with pride; and though she did not know it, with jealousy. Was this the secret of Mr. Meredith's forbearance? Was this why he asked her to be silent? And, above all, was she only one of the lot? She laughed in Mrs. Groom's face.

"Is Mr. Meredith so fascinating as all that?" she asked. "Or is that Madeleine such a beauty?"

"No beauty; but a red and white young thing, with blue eyes and a pretty neck. Jean Varot was mad about her; but I don't think he ever knew she cared for Mr. Meredith till she would not marry him. And then I fancy he found it out, and of course did not like it."

"Of course not," said Silvia, looking careless.

"It's a mortal pity to make too much of a man," resumed Mrs. Groom. "Yet I don't think Mr. Meredith minds."

"Of course not," again said Silvia, with a disdainful curl of her pretty lip. "Sultans never mind, they are too much used to it. What a lovely morning—I think I shall get up and have a walk."

"You will do very well, mamzelle," said Mrs. Groom, putting her stocking back in her pocket; "a walk will do you a world of good." But Mrs. Groom shook her head when she got outside the door.

Defiance is one of the great errors of the young. They meet life's sorrows and troubles in an aggressive spirit, which is not always courage. To brave an evil is not to conquer it; and, above all, to deny it, is not

to efface it and its bitter consequences. The great struggle of her life now lay before Silvia, and she began it by bold denial, and saying to herself that it did not exist. She would not in her pride confess that she suffered because she loved Mr. Meredith, whose love she had rejected. She would not say to her own heart, "You love him and you are jealous." This was her first venture on that unknown sea; she had begun by steering her bark wide of the haven she now wished to reach, and she scorned to acknowledge that she longed to change its course. She only knew that Jean Varot, who had attempted to murder Mr. Meredith, was jealous of him, and that every girl or woman who came near that charmer succumbed to his spells. She could not endure being numbered among his victims. Her proud blood revolted at the thought. Perhaps he thought that she cared for him because she had shown some fear for his safety. Well, then, he should see how cool, how indifferent she would be to him now that Jean Varot was gone. It was very soothing to come to such a conclusion; and Silvia rejoiced beforehand to think how heartfree she was, and how she could impress Mr. Meredith with her coldness and her indifference. So sure indeed was she of herself, that, without taking time to reflect on the propriety of what she was going to do, she resolved, as soon as she was dressed, to go down to the village and have a look at Jean Varot's inn. "I want to be sure that he is gone," she said to herself; "and to have a look at the house." What could that dwelling, which its master had deserted, tell her that she did not know already? Silvia did not put this question to herself, but taking the shortest and readiest way to Saint Rémy, she went at

once. The place was empty and sunlit. The door of the Hôtel d'Algérie stood wide open, but the low dark room within looked deserted. Silvia went up the steps, a little flurried at what she was doing. An old woman came out from an inner room, and stared at her with an inquiring look.

"Is Monsieur Varot within?" asked Silvia.

"Yes," replied the old woman, with a nod—"there, behind you."

And Silvia, turning round with a sudden start of fear, saw not the stolid, sinister face of the red-haired innkeeper, but a very pretty young woman, fair and pale.

"I am Madame Varot," she said, in a low, hesitating voice. "My brother-in-law is away. Please to tell me what you want."

Silvia did not answer at once. So this fair-haired, blue-eyed young woman was the secret cause, perhaps, of the hatred which had turned Jean Varot into a murderer.

"I wanted Varot," she said at length; "it will do when he comes back."

"Shall I send him to the château?" asked Madame Varot.

Silvia did not answer. Madame Varot reddened, and her blue eyes seemed to grow deeper and darker with the gaze which she fastened on Silvia; then she said suddenly, almost involuntarily,

"You are Madame de l'Epine's friend?"

"Yes," answered Silvia, "I am;" and she walked away without another word.

What had brought her? She knew it now, and her cheeks burned as she said it to herself, walking home-

wards up a shady lane, where birds were singing sweetly. She had come down to see the girl whose love had been so dangerous to Mr. Meredith, and she had had her wish, and now felt troubled to the very heart. Madeleine was not beautiful, but she had grace and natural refinement; and would Jean Varot have been so desperately jealous without cause?

"He would not—I am sure he would not," she thought, almost passionately.

Ah! how troubled are those years of youth, ever seeking turmoil and torment! What mattered this past story—this dream of a poor girl—to Silvia Nardi? Why, on that lovely morning, when the sky was almost Italian in its beauty, and the birds sang so joyously, did she find fever in the fresh breeze which fanned her cheeks, and fever in the deep, cool shade of the lane that wound up the slope, on the brow of which stood the old château?

From one of the many windows which looked down the lane, the Captain saw Silvia walking slowly, and he quickly came out for the express purpose of meeting her, as he told her at once.

"Mademoiselle Nardi," he said, a little eagerly, "I am delighted to see you up and well again. I am also much pleased to be able to speak to you quite alone, you know. Of course," he added, looking at her very anxiously, "you have not told Joséphine a word of what happened yesterday?"

"Not a word."

"I was sure of it, from her wonder, poor innocent dear, at that villain's disappearance; for you may have heard that he is gone."

"Yes," replied Silvia, "I have heard of it. "What

Madame Varot is that, whom I have just seen?" she asked, looking suddenly in the Captain's face.

He laid his finger to his nose, and looked very knowing.

"I sent her word last night to hide, poor little thing, and I suspect she took the hint, for Jean Varot went to look for her, but not finding her, went off. She is his sister-in-law."

"And you told her to come back here?" said Silvia, a little moodily.

"Yes, poor lamb, she is rid of that wolf now. Besides, she has got a child, and must look after the property, you know. Well, we, too, are rid of the villain. I am not so easy nor yet so trusting as Charlie, and when the news came that he was gone, I tracked him, Mademoiselle Nardi—I tracked him. Jean Varot is in Havre by this. Now, I have an old friend in Havre, an old sea captain, who is as keen as a fox. I have already sent him a telegram, which cost me a Napoleon, Mademoiselle Nardi—a Napoleon; and trust him for seeing the villain on board—trust him for seeing him off, I say! Oh! when I meddle in a thing," added the Captain, "I do it as it should be done, Mademoiselle Nardi."

Silvia heard him with a sort of indifference. A few hours before Jean Varot was everything. To have him safely banished—sent so far away, that he could think of returning no more, was all she cared for. Now it seemed nothing, for Jean Varot's sister-in-law remained behind, and her jealous Italian blood felt on fire. She gave that jealousy of hers no shape. She fashioned no future out of it. She accused Mr. Meredith of no wrong, but she was jealous, and just then she detested

him, and did not care if Jean Varot came back to-morrow.

"And you will not tell Joséphine a word of all this?" resumed the Captain.

"No, certainly," replied Silvia, so coldly that it was odd so shrewd a man as the good Captain must have been on his own showing, was not struck with the change from the passion and despair of yesterday to the indifference of to-day. But he had room for no wonder save that which Jean Varot's treachery still awakened in his mind. On that he dwelt freely.

"There never can have been such a villain!" he said, as they both walked back towards the house, "never. And yet I am glad Charlie did not shoot him yesterday, for, after all, he did save our two lives—yes, he did, the scoundrel! So it is better he should get off scathless, and get hung somewhere or other. But I think I had better leave you here, Mademoiselle Nardi, lest Joséphine should suspect something, you know."

Silvia had scarcely entered the château when she met Mr. Meredith in the hall. His face lit up with pleasure on seeing her looking so well, for her early walk and the fresh breeze had brought back to her cheeks the roses which deadly fear had sent away from them.

"How well you look!" he said—"how very well!"

"I am quite well," composedly replied Silvia. "I am glad to learn Jean Varot is gone."

She said it calmly, putting none of the questions which Mr. Meredith had apprehended, for he did not think he could answer them to her satisfaction. And,

having said this, she nodded to him and went up the stairs without once looking back.

"It is all to begin over again," he thought, looking after her with a sigh.

Madame de l'Epine's wonder and alarm at Jean Varot's disappearance superseded every other feeling in her mind when she and Silvia met at breakfast, and showed very plainly how ignorant she was of the real motives which had led to his sudden flight.

"What can have happened," she said again, "for such a steady, good honest fellow as Jean Varot to go off so?"

"Oh! yes, very honest!" grimly said the Captain, whilst every one of his working features seemed to say, "the rascal—the villain—the traitor!"

But Madame de l'Epine could not even suspect. She was too far from the truth, and she again sorrowfully wondered at so strange a disappearance. For some days she lived in the hope of Jean Varot's return; but when no news came of him, and it was plain he did not mean to come back, she felt convinced that there was some strange, sinister cause for his absence. She gave up the aviary, and even avoided mentioning the absent one's name, but it was plain that she brooded over the mystery of his departure, such as it was; and Silvia was at no loss to read the meaning of her friend's perplexed countenance, as she often leaned back in her chair and let her work drop on her lap in a sudden fit of abstraction. Her thoughts, such as they were, she kept to herself. No one else seemed to think of Jean Varot save the Captain, who once whispered to Silvia: "The villain is on his way to America;" and one of those long deep lulls which often

succeed the tempests of life as well as those of nature, followed his disappearance from Saint Rémy.

When he had been gone ten days, the Captain one evening drew Silvia aside, and whispered very solemnly:

"The vessel in which he sailed is lost—not a soul left. Don't tell Joséphine. I do not wish her to know just yet."

Silvia was shocked, but she could not help feeling relieved. Jean Varot was dead—Mr. Meredith was safe. Security and peace came with the knowledge.

CHAPTER III.

THE sun was shining in Madame de l'Epine's little sitting-room; it looked both bright and gay, but she leaned back in her chair pale and languid, and Silvia sat with her, looking anxious.

"Are you really better?" she asked.

"I am indeed, Silvia *mia*, but so sorry to have prevented you from seeing the opening of the branch line. You would have liked it."

"Yes, I should," frankly answered Silvia. "I dare say it was a pretty sight, but the Captain will tell us all about it."

"Charles is the better hand of the two at description," said Madame de l'Epine.

Silvia looked straight before her, and said nothing. She felt more disappointed than she cared to confess at having missed the sight of the opening of the line. She had looked forward to it for the last week with the eagerness with which youth looks forward to any-

thing like pleasure. The Prefet was to be present; the maires of all the neighbouring communes were to come; the firemen of Saint Rémy had promised to appear in their shining helmets; and Lady John and her friends were sure to be in the foremost ranks of the lookers-on. In short, it was to be a sight, and Silvia would have liked it dearly.

"There is Charles!" said Madame de l'Epine, suddenly.

Silvia raised her eyes, which had been fastened on the floor, and saw Mr. Meredith standing outside on the terrace.

"How are you?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh! so much better. How did it go on?"

"Charmingly, of course. I am sorry you could not come."

His regret seemed to be exclusively for his sister's loss. Ever since he and Silvia had met in the hall, and looking at her he had felt "It was all to begin over again," he had taken, or seemed to take, her indifference for granted. His manner and his bearing were a perpetual "Be it so," which Silvia saw and understood, and half liked, half resented. She was satisfied Mr. Meredith should think her anxiety for him was over with his danger; but she did not like to see how easily he could forget her when she was by. To show him how little she cared for his account of the ceremony she had been obliged to forego, she now rose and left the room.

"Do not go," said Madame de l'Epine, anxiously; "stay with us, Silvia *mia*."

"I want my work—I shall soon come back," replied Silvia, carelessly.

When she did return, Madame de l'Epine was reading, and had a pile of books around her. Silvia bit her lip. This was another sore point. Silvia had often seen with chagrin, in which reluctant admiration blended, that her tastes and habits were very foreign to those of Madame de l'Epine and her brother. She had seen that Mr. Meredith could at any time relinquish her society for that of books, or for the pursuit of those studies in which, spite many other tasks, his vigorous mind delighted. This she considered a very convincing proof of his indifference, and sitting down near Madame de l'Epine, she flung her work pettishly on the table, exclaiming with mingled envy and displeasure,

"How ignorant you both must find me! I mean Mr. Meredith and you, who think of nothing but study."

"Are you ignorant, Silvia?"

"Oh! so ignorant. I wish I were not."

"It is not too late to learn," kindly said her friend.

Silvia shook her head despondently.

"I should not know how to set about it."

"Ask Charles to teach you."

Silvia looked grave.

"Mr. Meredith has too much to do for that," she said.

"My dear, he and not you ought to decide the question. Charles," she added, calling her brother in from the sunny terrace, where he was smoking, and not giving Silvia time to object or remonstrate, "will you have a pupil, now that your work is over?"

A shy smile trembled on Silvia's pretty Grecian lip

as Madame de l'Epine made the proposal, and Mr. Meredith darted a keen look from his sister to Mademoiselle Nardi. His colour deepened as he said, "Gladly; but what am I to teach?"

"Oh! everything. You are to be Admirable Crichton for Mademoiselle Nardi."

"It will bore you," said Mr. Meredith, leaning on the window sill, and speaking rather gravely. "Study is an austere beauty."

"Perhaps it will bore you to teach me," a little mockingly retorted Silvia.

"Do you believe what you say?" he asked; and Silvia was disconcerted, and did not dare to say that she did.

"Then you believe what *you* say?" she said, after a pause; "you believe that study will bore me. What a good opinion you have of me, Mr. Meredith."

"I believe that Nature was prodigal of gifts to you," he replied, with an admiring smile; "but that the evil Fairy, who always steps in at the christening of kind Nature's darlings, withdrew one boon from the many you received."

"And that was?"

"Perseverance."

"Thank you," shortly replied Silvia; "and yet it is true," she added remorsefully, "I do not persevere."

"Never mind, dear," kindly said Madame de l'Epine, "we three will outwit the evil Fairy yet. I shall watch and not let the enemy in, and when your courage flags, Charles shall come to the rescue."

Silvia looked doubtfully at Mr. Meredith, who smiled very kindly.

"Oh! I shall try and be very good," she said eagerly. "Indeed, I will persevere."

"*Sicuro*," he said indulgently.

In her ardour for learning, Silvia would have attacked every study at once, but Mr. Meredith was too wise to yield to this devouring zeal for knowledge. He scarcely would let her learn at all. He only reserved to himself the right of choosing books for her reading in the day, and of long evening conversations, during which he either explained that which had remained obscure, or opened new and pleasing vistas to her eager gaze. Knowledge thus imparted is very delightful to acquire, and with that kind hand to remove every stone and brier from her path, Silvia advanced rapidly, nor thought once of looking behind to those idle fields of pleasure in which she had loitered so long. Now and then, indeed, the evil Fairy came; but thanks to Madame de l'Epine, her visits were few and far between.

One evening, however, traces of her recent presence were so visible, that Mr. Meredith, pushing the books away, said kindly:

"Let us talk of something else. You are very proud of being a Roman, Mademoiselle Nardi; but yet you are not all Roman, you know, since you are related to us. I wonder how much English blood——"

"Welsh!" she corrected.

"Ah! to be sure, I wonder how much Welsh blood you really have."

"Not much," she answered gravely, "not a wine-glassful. All the rest is Roman."

"Do not be too sure of that. I dare say the Vandal and the Goth have contributed their share. You

are related to us through our mother, who was a Thorpe. But have you not other Welsh ancestors? They were not all Thorpes, you know."

Silvia raised her arched eyebrows, and looked up at the blue starry sky, which the drawing-room window framed.

"I suppose not," she said carelessly.

"Are you not sure? Do you remember no name save that of Thorpe in the family annals?"

"There were some old English letters," replied Silvia, "which my mother always kept, and there was some name or other in them; but I have forgotten it. It was a Welsh name."

"Jones," said Mr. Meredith; "that is the national name, you know."

"No, it was not Jones."

"You have forgotten it, but I daresay you will remember later that Jones was the name."

"But I am sure it is not," said Silvia, a little vexed; "it was a pretty name—not Jones. You don't believe me," she added, reddening. "Well, then, I will go and fetch the letters, and you shall see that Jones is not the name."

Mr. Meredith did not protest against her taking that trouble to convince him; and Silvia, a little indignant, went up to her room at once.

Silvia was not rich, and one trunk held all her possessions. Amongst these was a packet of papers, yellow and time-stained, which she drew out with a wistful look and a thoughtful mien. These letters had been one of her lost mother's choicest and most valued relics. They still kept the scent of the rose-leaves in which they had lain for years, and the faint odour as

it filled Silvia's room was like one of those magic perfumes in Eastern fairy tales, which summon up strange visions before the gazer's eye. Sunlight filled the grey room; a pale young woman, unlike Silvia, and who owed, perhaps, to her northern blood the rich golden hair which fell around her fair face, sat reading passages from these very letters to the little brown child at her knee. The door opened, a dark, handsome man looked in and called them away; up jumped the child, and ran out into the green garden, and with a smile the mother put the letters back in the drawer with the rose-leaves.

"And a month later she was dead," thought Silvia, with dim eyes; "a month later she was in the campo santo, and before the year was out my father went there too."

Mademoiselle Nardi was rather grave and sad when she came down again with the packet in her hand. But she soon recovered her petulancy.

"The name is not Jones," she said, looking rather austere at Mr. Meredith; "I knew it was not. It is Clifford. You can see it," she added, putting the packet in his hand.

Mr. Meredith took it composedly, undid the string which tied the letters, and began looking over them deliberately. Silvia looked at him with some surprise. Did he not believe her assertion, that he wanted ocular proof of its correctness?

"Yes, the name is Clifford," he said, after a while. "A pretty name, as you say; and these letters, a hundred years old, as I see, were written by a Miss Clifford. Did she marry? Are you her descendant, Mademoiselle Nardi?"

Silvia shook her head in token of denial. She was sitting at the feet of Madame de l'Epine on a low stool, and her hands were clasped around her knees. Faint moonlight stole in through the open window, and the lamp shed its circle of yellow glow beyond the table on which it stood. In these two contending lights Silvia looked unusually grave and still.

"Miss Clifford never married," she said, after a while. "She was very beautiful, my mother said, but she never married."

"Why so?" asked Madame de l'Epine.

"It was her fault," replied Silvia. "At least, my mother said so," she added, hesitatingly.

"I daresay she was hard to please," put in Mr. Meredith. "For if she was beautiful and rich, lovers cannot have been wanting."

"Yes, she had plenty," carelessly replied Mademoiselle Nardi.

"And did she like none of them?"

Silvia seemed a little reluctant to answer this question.

"She married none," she said.

"I believe I have heard the story," quietly remarked Madame de l'Epine. "There was one whom she liked, but she rejected him through some caprice; he married some one else. So great was her regret and grief, that she would never marry."

"Yes, it was something like that," said Silvia.

"It was a Meredith whom she rejected," resumed Madame de l'Epine, with a grave smile. "A Meredith, from whom my brother and I are descended, Silvia."

"Indeed," said Mademoiselle Nardi.

She could not conceal her embarrassment, but wish-

ing to brave it out, she raised her eyes and looked up at Mr. Meredith. He sat by the table, with the light of the lamp shining full on his grave face. His eyes were reading her countenance, not unkindly, but calmly and steadily. He himself took care to explain that look.

"I am seeking for a Clifford likeness," he said, "but I find none. Yet you are descended from a Clifford."

"Yes, from Miss Clifford's younger brother. She had three, I believe."

"John Clifford?" he suggested.

"Yes, John Clifford. His son came to Rome with the Stuarts, you know."

"And from him you had your glassful of Welsh blood?"

"I suppose so. My mother was not like an Italian. She had blue eyes, hair of gold, and an English face. She was very beautiful, people said."

"Do you not remember her?"

"Oh! yes, but I did not know whether she was beautiful or not. She was my mother, you know."

"These letters are very interesting, Mademoiselle Nardi," said Mr. Meredith, glancing at the packet in his hand. "Do you object to lending them to me for a day or two?"

"You are welcome to them; but why do you care for them?"

"I do not believe in ghosts; but I believe in and like the dead. They are not dead to me in one sense; and old letters charm me greatly. I mean genuine letters written for a friend, not meant for the world at large. Even in these there is something which brings

the writer before you. This Miss Clifford ought to have been an ancestress of mine. I want to know what she was like, and she will be sure to tell it to me in these pages, written to her exiled nephew. I feel sleepless, and instead of having her opening my door and looking in at me a pale ghost, in the costume of a lady of Queen Anne's time, she will speak to me in the eternal language of womankind. She will give her nephew wise counsel concerning his health and good-behaviour, and will indulge in some tender regrets for his absence. Then there will be an account of her garden and pets, some questions concerning the dress of Roman ladies, and her blessing, to close all."

"And she will amuse you, and you will laugh at her," petulantly said Silvia; "and all these things which were to her so important will just keep you awake for an hour."

Mr. Meredith seemed inclined to answer this attack, but the entrance of his stepfather gave him no time to do so.

The evil Fairy, who had not been asked to the christening, chose to pay Silvia a rather long visit about this time; and the consequence of her appearance was, that books and study were greatly neglected, whilst the farmyard received more than a fair share of Mademoiselle Nardi's society.

The farmyard, however, was an altered place, for when it turned out, after Jean Varot's disappearance, that a note with which Mr. Meredith had entrusted Mrs. Jones for his sister, on the day which gave Silvia such bitter fears, had been lost by that careless lady, Madame de l'Epine, much displeased, sent the widow and

her children to England. Silvia had interceded for them in vain.

"My dear, they are doing no good here," Madame de l'Epine had answered a little coldly; "and if my dear father had not told a series of untruths for my sake, I should have been miserable about my brother; for as he never stays away without sending me word, I must have concluded that something dreadful had happened to him. Besides, I am not going to forsake Mrs. Jones. I am putting her in a fair way to do for herself in England."

So Mrs. Jones, to her great surprise, was banished. The next loss the farmyard sustained was in the person of Pataud, whom his master claimed back, his successor, Diamant, having proved a failure. The shed, the old carriage, and the turkey-cocks luckily remained to Silvia; and on a bright morning, when the evil Fairy, as we said, was paying her a visit, she went and entertained herself with them, and was engaged in teasing the unfortunate birds as usual, when Mrs. Groom's voice put an end to her pastime and their torment.

"Please, mamzelle, you're wanted," she said; "a gentleman's come for you."

"Wanted, and by a gentleman!" exclaimed Silvia. "What gentleman, Mrs. Groom? An Italian?" she added, with sparkling eyes.

"Not a bit of him. English, and looks like an old fox," added Mrs. Groom with unflattering frankness.

An English gentleman, who looked like an old fox, wanted to see Mademoiselle Nardi. She felt flurried, almost frightened at the intimation, and followed Mrs. Groom with uneven, hesitating steps. Surely

something was going to happen to her. Her hand shook a little as it rested on the lock of the drawing-room door, and when she opened it she did so slowly, and peeped in for a moment through the aperture. But the English gentleman who was like a fox sat with his back to the door, and it was Mr. Meredith's grave handsome face that met Silvia's eyes. Blushing at being caught, she entered the room hastily, and was glad to see Madame de l'Epine sitting a little away from her brother. She went up to her, and at once Madame de l'Epine introduced her to the stranger.

"Mademoiselle Nardi—Mr. Fox."

Silvia started in amazement; but the stranger's name was Fox, and nature had justified it by gifting him with a set of features keen, pointed, and demurely cunning.

"Does Miss Nardi——" began Mr. Fox, looking at Mr. Meredith.

"Not a word," he replied.

"Perhaps I had better tell Silvia," said Madame de l'Epine smiling. "My dear," she added, taking the young girl's hand within her own, "you remember the questions Charles put to you the other evening? He had a motive for them. You are half a Clifford on the mother's side, and through her, my dear, you are next of kin to the late Mr. Clifford. The posterity of the elder Clifford having failed, the younger branch comes in, and, so far as we can see and learn, you are the legal mistress of twenty thousand pounds. The rest of Mr. Clifford's fortune goes to charities."

"Twenty thousand pounds!" ejaculated Silvia. "Why, how much is that?"

"Five hundred thousand francs," quietly said Mr.

Meredith, watching the expression that passed across Silvia's face.

There was no mistaking its meaning. Joy, deep intoxicating joy was there, joy which Silvia did not seek to hide.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed, clapping her hands. "Oh! can that be?—can I really be rich?"

"Perhaps I had better put a few questions to the young lady first," here said Mr. Fox, as if to moderate her joy.

Silvia changed colour.

"What, is it doubtful? It is not certain?" she asked in sudden dismay.

"Few things are very certain," said Mr. Meredith, "yet this looks as sure as one can well imagine."

Silvia, much sobered, here turned to Mr. Fox to answer such questions as it might please him to put.

Mr. Fox did not say much, nor yet question much. He had, it seemed, inserted an advertisement in the *Times* concerning the next of kin of the late Mr. Clifford, which had induced Mr. Meredith to write to him, and the correspondence had ended in his visit to Saint Rémy.

"I did not come on purpose," he cautiously added, "but having business near here, I thought I might as well call on Miss Nardi, and ascertain the nature of her claims."

"But I don't claim anything," said Silvia, much disappointed.

Mr. Fox darted a keen look at her, and supposed she "would not be averse to the possession of twenty thousand pounds."

"No, of course not," she impatiently answered;

"but how am I to claim that money? I knew nothing about it."

"The great point for the present," here remarked Mr. Meredith, "is to explain to Mr. Fox the nature of your relationship to the late Mr. Clifford."

"And how should I know the nature of my relationship to a man whom I never saw nor heard of," she petulantly answered.

Mr. Fox gave her another look of his little red eyes, but said nothing.

"Perhaps I had better be genealogist," quietly put in Mr. Meredith, addressing Mr. Fox, but looking at Silvia, "if I am wrong, Mademoiselle Nardi will set me right. Sir Henry Clifford had three sons in 1715. The two elder ones abided by King George, the youngest sided with King James. He went to Saint Germain; but died in Rome. His son John married a Roman lady, by whom he had two daughters; one became a nun, the other married a Cavalier Rossi, who was Mademoiselle Nardi's grandfather, and whose only descendant she is."

"Yes, that is it," said Silvia, looking at Mr. Fox, as if she expected him to hand her the twenty thousand pounds forthwith.

But Mr. Fox did no such thing. He did not even express any opinion on the information he had received.

He coughed demurely behind his hand, drew on his gloves, looked at Silvia, then said quietly:

"Of course all that can be proved legally."

"I will undertake that it shall be so," said Mr. Meredith.

Mr. Fox rose, took his leave, and Mr. Meredith left the drawing-room with him.

Silvia looked at them from the window. They were pacing the sunlit terrace up and down; Mr. Meredith spoke, but Mr. Fox seemed satisfied with listening.

Their conversation was soon over, and Mr. Meredith came back alone.

"Well!" said Silvia eagerly, as he entered the drawing-room.

"Well," he replied, smiling, "I think there is very little reasonable doubt that you are the rightful heir to Mr. Clifford's twenty thousand pounds. Mr. Fox will not commit himself, but I feel certain he is quite convinced."

"It is very good of him to take all that trouble," said Silvia, naïvely.

"If he does it out of pure kindness, it is very good of him, as you say," replied Mr. Meredith, smiling, "but I daresay Mr. Fox will have made something out of the Clifford estate before the matter is over."

Silvia did not seem to hear this.

"And so I am really a rich girl," she said, looking from him to his sister with a naïve joy, that made them smile. "I wonder if I am altered," she added, turning to the deep, dark mirror—"not a bit! This is just the same as the poor Silvia Nardi I saw this morning. For she was very poor, you know," she added, with a shrewd nod of her brown head. "She had a very little income. And she thought a good deal of spending a franc, she did; but now she is going to turn extravagant. What shall I do with all that money?" she added, musingly. "Oh! I know," she resumed, with flashing eyes, "I shall build a palazzo, an Italian palazetto, here in Saint Rémy."

“My dear!” remonstratively began Madame de l’Epine.

“I will! I will!” petulantly exclaimed Silvia; “I like Saint Rémy, and I will have a palazetto, or a villa rather—an Italian villa, somewhere near here. Oh! it will be so beautiful!” she added, in an ecstasy of delight.

Joséphine thought she was jesting, but soon found that Silvia was in as sober earnest as a person can be whose head has been turned by unexpected good fortune. She was feverish and excited indeed, but she meant every word she said. She was bent on having the Italian villa, and only wondered where she should put it. Aladdin’s famous palace was not a more moveable commodity than Silvia’s villa. Seeing that contradiction was useless, and only provoked her, Madame de l’Epine humoured her, and began looking out for a favourable position.

“What do you say to the field on the hill?” she suggested.

“Charming!” cried Silvia, clapping her hands; “such a view, and the garden going down the slope! I will fetch a sheet of paper and draw it for you directly.” And away she ran.

When the door closed upon her, Madame de l’Epine went up to her brother, and laying her hand on his arm, said gently, “Charles!”

He looked up with a start.

“Well?” he said.

“Well, you are sorry for this?”

“Sorry to see her take it so, Joséphine.”

“And how would you have the child take it?” she asked, indulgently. “She is at the age when all the

love of fairy-tales remains without the faith. Of course she does not believe in enchanted treasure, in heaps of diamonds and pearls, in glass palaces or gardens of Armida, but she likes these things in her heart; and when that modern magician, Money, comes to her, and she knows it can give them, or things very like them, to her for the wishing, why of course she is glad, and being open as the sun, does not hide her gladness."

"Everything the poor king touched became gold," said Mr. Meredith, with a rueful sigh; "but we are not told that anything was improved by the transformation. I cannot help fearing that some harm, some evil will come to Mademoiselle Nardi through this money."

"Of which she would not have a farthing but for you."

"Very true. But, in the first place, it was my duty to act as I did; in the second, I did not think the change would affect her so."

"Well, do not scold her, at least."

"Have I a right to scold, Joséphine? Why, she has not even looked at me since she became an heiress."

Here the door opened abruptly, and Silvia entered the room, exclaiming eagerly,

"It will never do on the hill, Joséphine, the wind is too keen."

"Will you have it by the river?"

"Delightful!" was the enthusiastic reply; "the river shall flow through the garden, and I shall stock it with fish, and have water-lilies and rushes and dragon-flies and butterflies——"

"I wonder how you will secure them?" interrupted Mr. Meredith.

"Well, then, I shall have bees," impatiently said Silvia, "and bee-hives. You don't see any harm in that, Mr. Meredith, do you?" she asked, with a little touch of temper.

"Oh! not at all," he said coldly; and looking at his watch he left the room.

"Mr. Meredith does not look pleased with my good fortune," warmly said Silvia.

"You naughty child, but for him you would never have had a chance of it."

Silvia blushed, and looked ashamed.

"And I never thanked him!" she exclaimed.

"Thank him now," whispered Madame de l'Epine, for the door had opened again, and Mr. Meredith had come back for a book he had forgotten. Half shy, half daring, Silvia went up to Mr. Meredith.

"You have been very good," she said; "but why did you tell me nothing? Why did you let that Mr. Fox come and turn my head with that story of twenty thousand pounds?"

"Surely your head is not turned," replied Mr. Meredith, smiling down in her face.

"It does not feel so steady as when Mrs. Groom found me with the turkey-cocks," frankly said Silvia. "I suppose you are in a great hurry?" she added, glancing at the book he held.

"Not if you want me to do anything for you," courteously said Mr. Meredith.

"Well, then, draw me a villa, an Italian villa," she said, coaxingly.

She drew a chair for him, placed a sheet of paper and a pencil on the table, and, fairly taken by surprise, Mr. Meredith yielded.

"A villa, an Italian villa?" he said, looking round at her over the back of his chair.

"Yes," she answered, her dark eyes sparkling like diamonds, and her face flushed with excitement and desire.

Mr. Meredith seemed to meditate. In reality he was looking at Silvia. He was charmed, because her present mood became her, and made her irresistibly fascinating and pretty, and he was pained, jealously pained; because the girl whose whole heart seemed bent on money and an Italian villa, appeared very different from that girl who had thrown herself between him and Jean Varot's gun, whom his danger had driven to despair, and perhaps first wakened to love. That devoted, ardent Silvia, that Silvia so shy and tender, that other girl who listened to him with devout attention, and studied with eager desire and fond ambition to become more worthy of him, as he saw very well, seemed to have melted away like the snowy Florimel. The girl he saw had found another idol, and worshipped at another shrine.

"Well," she said, a little impatiently, "you are not beginning."

Mr. Meredith at once set to his task. Oh! what a villa did he rear for Silvia! A cool gallery ran around it. With a few touches from his water-colour box Mr. Meredith covered that gallery with rich frescoes. He left a door open, and you saw the hall, with a white statue, and green shrubs, and the shine of a little fountain dancing up. And beyond and around the villa rose trees that cast their shade over grassy lawns, where flowers bloomed; and in front of the picture ran the little river, and in a wild, retired nook, away from

sight of the house, Mr. Meredith put a bee-hive. All this took time, but Mr. Meredith gave it freely, pleased and amused to hear Silvia's shrewd comments and exclamations of delight. At length he handed it to her with a smile, and, radiant with joy, she showed it to Madame de l'Epine.

"And this is your villa. How much will it cost to build?"

"Five hundred thousand francs," replied Mr. Meredith, half in jest, half in earnest.

"Why, there will be nothing left!" exclaimed Silvia, dismayed. "Nothing for servants, for a carriage, for clothes, and for living!"

"Nothing, indeed!"

"Oh! that is too bad!" she said, much vexed. "It was so pretty!"

"Have a plainer one," said Joséphine.

"Have diamonds," he suggested.

"I will," she replied, with a saucy look. "I know you say it to vex me, but I will have diamonds. A tiara, a necklace, ear-rings, bracelets, rings. I shall be the queen of diamonds!" she added, bursting into a joyous laugh, and forgetting, in her triumph over Mr. Meredith, the annoyance of the villa. "And you shall draw the setting for me," she despotically added. "Wait, I shall fetch you more paper."

"Her head is turned, decidedly turned," said Mr. Meredith, as she left the room. He looked half amused and half provoked.

His sister went up to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"Perhaps all this is for the best," she said; "perhaps, Charles, perhaps, unless you give her up before——"

"Give her up!" he exclaimed, with sudden paleness. "Did I not tell you I would not, and could not."

"Well, then, humour her— humour her now, or matters will not go well between you."

"You do not know what I feel," he replied more calmly, but still much disturbed. "She is good, who knows it better than I do, but oh! she is not wise, she is not prudent, and she knows no self-restraint. She has a hundred faults, and—and—I cannot do without her. No, I cannot. The mere thought that she should escape me, and go to some other man, is distracting; and though I believe she likes me, do not imagine I am so blind as to think Mademoiselle Nardi adores me! She likes me because we have been much together, because I have spared nothing to win her. I have done a hundred things for that of which she has no conception, and I have the result in her liking, such as it is. But the very first minute I saw her I felt 'this is the one,' and she, as you know, disliked me. You tell me to humour her now, because you too see that a word, a breath would ruin all. Yes, I know it, and I will bear with anything rather than run the risk; but it is hard—surely it is hard such a risk should be."

"And now for the diamonds," said Silvia, coming in with her bright face.

And Mr. Meredith obediently drew settings for the diamonds as he was bid.

"Single ladies do not wear diamonds," said Madame de l'Epine gravely.

Mr. Meredith never looked up from his task, but Silvia blushed and was silent. After a while, however,

her lively little tongue was once more busy. Madame de l'Epine was reading, and seemed to have forgotten them, and Silvia felt that silence was an utter impossibility at the present time.

"You have spoken to me about Chemistry," she suddenly said; "you can make rubies, I believe—can't you make diamonds?"

"Not even to please you."

Was there involuntary tenderness in the words? Did Mr. Meredith's look unconsciously express that it was in his power to please Silvia in many ways? She looked at him in grave doubt, and Madame de l'Epine, who had heard nothing, here unluckily said:

"Silvia, you did not tell Mr. Fox poor Miss Clifford's story."

Silvia paused.

"Was it necessary?" she asked, a little shortly. "Besides, why call her poor Miss Clifford?"

"Was she not unhappy?"

"Not at all. She pleased herself in not marrying. Oh! that is the setting. How kind of you, Mr. Meredith!"

She took the paper carelessly, and went and sat by her friend. Presently Mr. Meredith heard his sister saying:

"My dear, is that the drawing you are tearing up?"

Silvia did not answer. But he saw them both—his sister grave and wondering, Silvia saucy and smiling; and he saw, too, the torn bits of paper lying on the floor.

CHAPTER IV.

SOME privileged people can give way to temper and caprice, and feel all the happier for the indulgence; but to that favoured tribe Silvia did not belong. She had scarcely done all she could to convince Mr. Meredith that she did not care about him, than she repented. She tried not to feel so, but the fond yearning impulse of meeting his look once more in all friendliness was stronger than pride. She longed to undo her own work. But how so? It was not easy, and by the time Silvia had found a way, Mr. Meredith had left the drawing-room.

"It will do this evening," thought Silvia; but when evening came Mr. Meredith was gone. An accident had occurred to a railway bridge several leagues away; he had been summoned in a hurry, whilst Silvia was in her room, and, as Madame de l'Epine said with a sigh, there was no knowing when he would come back.

"I am justly punished," thought Silvia remorsefully.

Madame de l'Epine's prophecy was fulfilled. Days passed, and Mr. Meredith did not return. A tunnel went wrong when the railway bridge got right, and the tunnel was much farther away than the bridge. Silvia got irritable and fretful; then fell into a fit of melancholy, which Madame de l'Epine was not sorry to see.

"The naughty child will know better another time," she thought.

But naughty children do not, as a rule, know better. Silvia was very good at first, and read a great deal, to prove her penitence; then she put all reading by in a dudgeon, and squandered away time like a young prodigal, dividing it pretty equally between the farmyard and Mrs. Groom. But after a while Made-moiselle Nardi found that neither the turkey-cocks nor Mrs. Groom were as entertaining as they had once been. The birds grew languid and would not be roused, and Mrs. Groom had troubles which she did not care to impart to Silvia. Philip, her Philip! had got into trouble, and wrote pitiful letters for money, which Mrs. Groom, who was irritated and disappointed, would not send. She grew slightly morose, and took such dark views of life about this time, that Silvia sought her society less and less, and became misanthropic in her turn. It was then that she took to disliking Mr. Meredith, and pondering over his faults, until at length one morning after breakfast she suddenly took it into her head to go down to Saint Rémy, and see if Jean Varot's sister-in-law was so very pretty. To her surprise the inn was shut up.

"Madame Varot has been gone a week," said a man who was passing by.

Silvia became crimson, and turned away without a word. She walked very fast along the lanes that led back to the château, and she did not know why she was in such a hurry. She did not know why her cheeks felt so hot, and there was so strange a sense of tightness at her heart.

Luckily, if youth's feelings are keen, they are fleeting. A travelling carriage changed the whole current of Silvia's thoughts. It was coming down the lane,

and most probably from the château. As she stood by to let it pass, Silvia saw with a beating heart that it was empty. Had he come back? The thought drove every other thought away. Eagerly, swiftly she hastened up the path, and reached the château out of breath. The very first person whom she met in the hall gave her the information she desired.

"Mrs. Groom," cried Silvia, forgetting both dignity and pride in her eagerness to know the truth, "what has happened? I know something has happened. I am sure of it by your looks; but what is it?"

"You met the carriage," replied Mrs. Groom drily, "and it went back empty. The more's the pity," added Mrs. Groom with an ominous shake of the head—"the more's the pity."

Silvia was thoroughly at a loss to understand this speech. But Mrs. Groom kindly explained it.

"I thought——" began the young girl.

"Thinking has nothing to do with it, mamzelle. The plain fact is, that Monsieur de l'Epine has got tired of walking up and down the Rhine, that he came back ten minutes ago, and that before five minutes were out he had made it up with his wife and his father-in-law."

Surprise and disappointment at first kept Silvia mute.

"I thought it was Mr. Meredith," she said at length.

"Bless you, he knew Mr. Meredith was out of the way, or he would never have shown his face here." And muttering some unflattering epithets, Mrs. Groom walked up the old stone staircase.

It was very unlikely that Madame de l'Epine's

husband should, whilst sojourning on the banks of the Rhine, have had a perfectly accurate knowledge of his brother-in-law's movements in Saint Rémy—unless, indeed, he happened to be gifted with clairvoyance, which was not probable. But that want of charity which is at the root of a genuine hate, is also, by a providential punishment, a want of reason; and Mrs. Groom firmly believed every word she said. Silvia was not far from sharing her belief. Ever since she had come to Saint Rémy, Monsieur de l'Epine had been the ogre of her imagination. The prospect of seeing him, of conversing with him, and of being compelled to be on civil, if not friendly terms with this sinner, made her feel both angry and indignant. She at once went up to her room to delay the evil moment, and when, tired of her confinement, she stole downstairs, she passed the drawing-room door on tiptoe, crossed the broad terrace as swiftly as her feet could bear her without running, and entered the garden with a joyous feeling of naughtiness and escape.

"I am safe now till dinner," she thought, "safe from that horrible wicked man. What business has he to come back after leaving poor Joséphine so long? I hate him, I feel I do! Of course I must be civil to him, but more than civility he shall not get from me."

As she came to this severe conclusion, Silvia, whose eyes had been downcast, raised them with the sudden consciousness that someone was near her.

She saw a handsome man, tall, large-bearded, and florid, standing within ten paces of her, and who politely threw away his cigar as he saw her.

"This is Monsieur de l'Epine," thought Silvia,

trying to feel horrified, and to her great surprise not able to do so.

We all know that there were Syrens long ago, and some of us do know that there are Syrens still. Nay, the shrewd and clear-sighted, the men and women who can fathom ancient Myths, and give them a modern reading, have been heard to declare that these Syrens of our own day do not all wear chignons and silk gowns; but often don broadcloth, and display bearded chins. This, indeed, is their subtlest, and, because the least expected, their surest disguise.

But Silvia, though she had talked to the Syrens in the grotto in Sorrento, knew little of their ways as yet. She only acknowledged them under the heathen aspect of sweet-voiced singers, who lured mariners, and sported in the waves that showed the fair woman and hid the unsightly fish. It was on hearsay that she disliked the man before her. But she had scarcely given him a look when hearsay was forgotten, and dislike yielded to a pleasurable impression. And she did not mistrust this; she did not say to herself that this agreeable gentleman might be very different from what he seemed to be. All her life long she had been self-reliant because she had been so lonely, and she could not, and would not relinquish the habit in a moment.

Monsieur de l'Epine gave her a rapid, surprised look. She had come as suddenly upon him as he had come upon her, and she now stood before him like a bright sunbeam lighting up the dark green gloom of trees behind her; a gay, pretty creature, with the curious and fearless look of a young bird. He was a good judge of beauty, a keen judge of character; in a moment he had decided in his mind that his wife's

friend was a very fascinating young person, of an open, ingenuous nature. Courteously, yet with a frank, easy way that became his frank and easy aspect, Monsieur de l'Epine said, as he drew nearer:

"Mademoiselle Nardi must allow me to introduce myself. I have been too long anxious to know my wife's dear friend to delay even one moment making her acquaintance."

What was there in these words? Nothing assuredly, but the look, the tone, the manner, were much, no doubt, for they charmed Silvia almost instantaneously. How could a man who had such frank blue eyes, a smile so winning, and such handsome white teeth, be the monster Mrs. Groom had described him? Her expressive smiling face told Monsieur de l'Epine his victory. He followed it up at once. He began with Italy. Beautiful Italy! Rome, the land of great men and heroic deeds. There was no country like Italy. No city like Rome.

"Oh! no, there is not!" cried credulous little Silvia, with her dark eyes flashing.

And she could not help thinking with pain how generous this maligned Monsieur de l'Epine could be, whilst Charles Meredith, the gentleman of unblemished name, was so severe on the glories of her country.

For a while Monsieur de l'Epine was deeply, hotly Italian, or rather Roman. Then by a transition which almost seemed to imply that if he had been born on the favoured soil of Italy, he would have been a very different man, he entered into the subject of his own misdeeds. Of course Silvia had heard about him, and of course he had no right to suppose that the account was a favourable one. He knew he deserved anything

his poor uncle and Madame Groom might say of him; his dear wife—this was spoken with much feeling—would say nothing; but though she, Silvia, could not have a very good opinion of him, he trusted she would find him better than he had been painted. The fact was his mother had spoiled him, the world itself had spoiled him, everything and everybody had spoiled him, and he had not valued his dear wife according to her true worth. But now he was a wiser and a better man. He had received some hard lessons, too, and was firmly resolved to mend his ways. All this he said with an almost boyish frankness of manner which went to Silvia's heart; and with a pleasant fluency, which certainly captivated her ear.

“And now, Mademoiselle Nardi,” he added, drawing to her side, speaking as confidentially as if they had been friends of ten years standing, and giving her a doubtful, humorous look of his frank blue eyes, “now, do tell me how I am to convince that terrible Madame Groom that my penitence is sincere. My uncle and Joséphine will have faith in me, of course, but Madame Groom is as mistrustful as the dragon in the fairy-tale; and how shall I fascinate her?”

Surely the man who confessed his faults with such openness, and now deplored them with a laugh so light and so winning, could be no hardened sinner. Silvia felt convinced of his sincerity, and she unhesitatingly forsook Mrs. Groom's stern banner for Monsieur de l'Epine's bright pennon, which fluttered so gaily in the morning breeze of life. Only, why had he never once mentioned his brother-in-law's name? Why did these two men dislike each other, and whose was the fault? Could this good-natured, amiable Monsieur

de l'Epine be always in the wrong? But if people would be too exacting, what was to be done? This impression, which was getting more and more favourable to himself, Monsieur de l'Epine confirmed by suddenly remarking with a sigh,

"I suppose no one can tell what a misfortune it is for a man to grow up without a sister, an ever-indulgent, yet true friend to advise him. Have you got a brother, Mademoiselle Nardi? No. Ah! what a pity! I consider it a misfortune," he added, more gaily, "to have, as it were, a sister lost."

This was a master-stroke, though Monsieur de l'Epine could not know it. For was it not Silvia's weak point to think that she would have made such a sister? So she looked at him with ever-increasing benignity and good-will as they walked back together to the château; and by the time it rose before them grey and sunlit on the blue air, with silvery pigeons wheeling above its rusty vanes and tall brick chimneys, and swallows twittering beneath the many eaves to which they and their ancestors had come year after year for centuries, Silvia was quite won over to the enemy. As they crossed the broad-flagged terrace, they met Mrs. Groom, who was leaving the house by a side door. Mrs. Groom's eye, as it lit on Monsieur de l'Epine, so plainly said, "I don't like you," that this gentleman indulged himself with a half-knowing, half-remorseful wink to Silvia, by which her gravity was well-nigh disconcerted.

"Of course you know my wife's valued friend," he said to Silvia, as if bent on propitiating the dragon.

"I know Mrs. Groom very well," replied Silvia, trying not to laugh.

"I do not suppose my wife could have a more trustworthy person near her than Mrs. Groom," he continued, purposely moving, so as to check Mrs. Groom's further progress.

"There may be people less trustworthy than I am near Madame de l'Epine," drily said Mrs. Groom; and stepping aside she passed on.

Monsieur de l'Epine shrugged his shoulders, and laughed very freely at the "Dragon;" whilst Silvia blushed with shame at Mrs. Groom's rudeness. But Monsieur de l'Epine was too happy to be angry with any one. Besides, he had only left his dear wife to smoke a cigar, and now seeing her reading by the open window of her favourite room, he went up to her with a buoyant step and a beaming face. Ah! what troubled joy shone in her sad eyes as she gazed up at him—the joy of one who had suffered much. Silvia had remained behind, but could see them both; her pale friend looking paler in the soft gloom of the room; the handsome sinner looking handsomer still in the bright sunlight of the terrace. "I am sure he will be good now," she thought.

"The precious rascal!" muttered an angry voice behind her.

She turned round, and of course saw Mrs. Groom coming back, and crossing the terrace once more. "For shame, Mrs. Groom!" said Silvia, in a low, but reproving voice; "for shame! He left her to smoke a cigar, and as soon as he had done he came back."

"He once smoked a cigar that lasted two years," replied Mrs. Groom, austere, though she too spoke low; "and suppose he smokes another of the sort."

"Oh! I hope not!—I hope not!" eagerly said Silvia; "and I cannot believe it, Mrs. Groom!"

"And what do you know about it, mamzelle?" asked Mrs. Groom, giving her a compassionate look. "What do you know about it? Just tell me that."

Of course Silvia knew nothing; and having thus figuratively knocked her down, as it were, Mrs. Groom left her.

"It is a pity he ever went away, to be sure," thought Silvia, walking down the steps of the terrace, and going over to the kitchen garden, where some strawberry-beds every morning claimed her attention. "I do wish he had not."

A pleasant place, though rather sunny, was that kitchen garden. But Silvia's young Italian blood could endure the sun. She liked this place, where grapes and peaches ripened on the walls, and where the rich mould yielded salads cool and crisp, sweet-scented herbs and vegetables, delicious in their freshness and maturity. It was pleasant to walk between paths edged with the thyme and laurel, dear to old French *ragoûts*, and to see the young asparagus coming up, the tender peas ripening in their green pods, and the heads of foolish cauliflowers growing white and mealy, heedless of their coming fate.

All this was pleasant; but the further end of the garden, where the broad stone basin, full of water, which fed the whole place, was to be found, was Silvia's favourite haunt. For there stood the currant and gooseberry bushes, and there spread the strawberry-beds which she delighted in. What, indeed, could be more delightful than to sit down on the earth

and pick one coral bead after another from under its shelter of green leaves, whilst soft breezes passed over this quiet, favoured spot, and birds hopped about the alleys, seeing Silvia very well; and some bold sparrows came within a few paces of her to pick up the crumbs which she saved up for them, and scattered with a liberal hand around her.

“Oh! now that’s jolly!” cried the gay voice of Miss Georgie Lovell; and Silvia, looking up, saw that exuberant young lady herself coming up to her with a dancing step, her little round face beaming from under the shade of a pink-lined parasol.

“Oh! do come and eat!” cried Silvia, eagerly. “There are hundreds of strawberries—thousands, I believe!”

“I don’t mind if I do,” was Miss Georgie Lovell’s reply.

They had met several times since Mr. Meredith’s departure, and had resumed their old friendly and familiar footing.

“I say, Silvia,” said Miss Georgie, as she squatted down on the ground, and made a sweeping attack on the red ripe fruit, “do tell me if you know who’s come to Saint Rémy. We saw a travelling-carriage and luggage, and we are all dying to know.”

“Madame de l’Epine’s husband arrived this morning.”

Nothing could exceed Miss Georgie Lovell’s surprise on hearing this, unless it was her eagerness to know how and why the truant had come back, and especially how he had been received. But if curiosity made her forget to go on with the strawberries, as she

would have said herself, Silvia picked and ate with unmoved composure, and said very coolly,

“*Cara mia*, what is all that to us? Here are strawberries; let us eat, that will do!”

“I like him, you know,” said Miss Lovell, a little defiantly.

“Do you know him, then?”

“Don’t I! We saw a lot of him in Germany—heaps of him!” continued Miss Lovell, with that happy, and thoroughly original and refined phraseology in which she delighted; “and I like him. He’s so big and so jolly!” she added, exuberantly. “Besides, his wife is a muff, you know.”

Silvia started up and stamped her foot in sudden wrath.

“Miss Lovell,” she said, with flashing eyes, “how dare you insult my friend to me!”

Miss Lovell tried to whistle, but failed miserably; she tried to knit her smooth eyebrows into a frown, and felt that she failed in this too, so she took refuge in speech, and found there that masculine vigour which nature had perversely denied to her outward woman.

“I like pluck!” she said, a little superciliously; “in a girl especially. Some people call it spirit—I say pluck. But don’t you think, Miss Nardi, that you have a little, just a *little* too much of it?”

Silvia’s anger had already fallen, and she sat down to the strawberries again; but she looked at her companion wistfully and sadly, and shook her head over her, as it were.

“That is the way,” she said. “You are a saint, a great soul, a beautiful soul, you can bear wrong and do none; you are full of charity and grace, but you

are not brilliant, you are not showy, and your husband leaves you, and the world laughs at you. Oh! Georgie! Georgie! if you had a husband, and if you loved him, and he left you——”

“I should give him a good shaking, or pull his hair, or slap his face, or do something, I don’t know what, but something,” interrupted Miss Lovell, with unfeigned energy of look and manner. “I tell you he should *not* leave me,” she added, more calmly, but with great decision. “I would never allow *that*—and that’s just why I find fault with her, you know. Why does she allow it? But, I say!” exclaimed Miss Lovell, suddenly reverting to Lady John and her guests, “I shall not tell them who’s come, you know. They’ll never guess; and I shall have a good afternoon’s worry out of them, shan’t I? And I think I had better go at once.”

Worry was one of the sporting attributes of Miss Lovell’s mind. So delightful indeed was it to this faithless dove to keep her olive branch hidden under her wing for awhile, that she now longed to go back to the ark, not to give, but to withhold information. So, scarcely making an excuse for her abruptness, she gave up both Silvia and the strawberries, and danced away along the same path up which she had come. Silvia escorted her to the door of the kitchen-garden, which was walled in, let her out on the road, and looked after her little parasol, that went bobbing up and down in the sun, and again shook her head over Miss Georgie Lovell. “She thinks herself a little man, you know,” said Silvia to her own thoughts; “and she is a little—ah! such a little butterfly!”

And as no one was ever angry with a butterfly yet,

Silvia magnanimously forgave the thoughtless sinner. She had closed the door, and was turning back, when she heard the Captain's cheery voice. She looked and saw him coming towards her. The Captain was another man. It was not the broad sunshine in which he walked which had thus transfigured him from his usual genial happiness to radiant delight. The purest joy shone in his honest face, and gave it a meaning so exultant that Silvia could not help smiling at him.

"Going to the strawberries, eh?" said the Captain, gaily; "nothing like a bed of strawberries in my opinion, Mademoiselle Nardi. Better than apricots or figs or melons. Better!—why, what are apricots?—apricots are trash!" dogmatically asserted the Captain; "contemptible trash!—mere counterfeits of peaches. I wonder Joséphine touches them!"

"I dote on apricots," gravely said Silvia.

But instead of taking up the glove, the Captain burst out into one of his loud and happy "ha! ha's!" His heart was too full of joy for argument—it was so full, indeed, that he poured it all out before Silvia.

"You do not mind my staying here with you, Mademoiselle Nardi?" he said; "but the fact is I came here to be out of their way. A pair of lovers—a pair of lovers," added the Captain, whose honest eyes were glistening. "I don't mind telling you, Mademoiselle Nardi, that I loved that boy as if he had been a son of mine; and now that he has come back, I feel like the father of the prodigal. Poor Louis! If he had but had a wise mother, or a sister like Joséphine, he would have been a very different man from what he is. Not that Louis is a bad fellow, but too easy, too easy! Any one can impose on him. A mere baby! And

amazingly clever—quite a head for business. A great deal more clever than Charlie—not in engineering, of course. Oh! no, Charlie is the man there; but in figures and calculation. I was quite amazed to hear him half an hour ago. Why, he proved to me as clear as two and two make four, that there is a fortune, a real fortune lying idle—no matter where. I am afraid I must not enter into particulars,” added the Captain, pursing up his lips mysteriously. “But it is a fact—a real fact. Yet I doubt if he will make anything of it,” he resumed, shaking his head at the prodigal. “He took out his pocket-book, covered it with figures, scribbled it all down, then put it back and laughed. ‘Ah! bah!’ says he, ‘where is the use of all that money, eh, uncle? One is just as happy without it.’ Now,” argued the Captain, striking the ground with his stick, “*I* contend, Mademoiselle Nardi, that the man who can honestly increase his fortune, is bound to do so. Besides, Louis and Joséphine are both young—they may have children—four, five, six children,” continued the Captain, warming with his subject; “and then is it not their father’s duty to provide handsomely for them? Positively I must talk it over with Louis. The boy must not be so easy and so foolish. Why, if I do not interfere, he is quite capable of letting some one else take hold of his idea, carry it out, and actually rob him of all that money.”

“That would be a pity,” said Silvia, much interested.

“A pity!” echoed the Captain, again using his cane, and speaking quite vehemently, “it would be a sin, a mortal sin, Mademoiselle Nardi! It would be atrocious, abominable I may say. But Louis is *such* a baby! I often told him so. ‘Louis, Louis,’ I used to say, ‘if

you had seen life as I have, and been tossed about the world as only an old soldier can be tossed, you would know better than you do. You would not let yourself be taken advantage of, Louis!’ But the foolish fellow only shrugged his shoulders. A baby, Mademoiselle Nardi, a mere baby.”

The Captain was a great talker, and there is no knowing how much longer he might have gone on discoursing, if the gardener had not come up to put a question concerning the management of a new watering machine invented by the Captain himself.

“Come, Mademoiselle Nardi, give us your opinion, if you please,” said the Captain, with a beaming face; “my invention, you know,” he added, tapping his forehead, “all my own.”

The machine was very complicated, very ingenious, and had only one drawback—it would not water. The Captain was a little disconcerted at first, then laughed at his own discomfiture, then thought he would like to know what Louis thought of it. So Louis was sent for, and came and gave the most soothing of condemnatory verdicts; and was as delightful and charming as a nephew and son-in-law could well be, and it was evident, even to Silvia, that these two had never been on better terms.

There is no doubt something indestructible in the nature of true faith, for the Captain had come back as completely to perfect belief in his nephew, as if that belief had never had bitter cause to be shaken. He forgot that he had been wholly deceived about Jean Varot, and that the man before him had not been true. Trust was as natural to him as sweet waters to a bounteous river. With Madame de l’Epine a stronger

power was at work. When Silvia saw her with her husband before dinner, she read in her flushed face a story she had never read there before. It could not be perfect happiness, for that has never known doubt or fear; but it was happiness none the less. Never, indeed, even in the brief honeymoon days, had Monsieur de l'Epine been so charming, so perfectly fascinating as he was now. He was gay and he was penitent. He looked happy though remorseful, and somewhat ashamed of the past.

Then he was so pleasant. He laughed so heartily at the Captain's jokes; he was so tenderly attentive to his long neglected wife, that if Silvia could have had any doubts of his genuine remorse, which she had not, these doubts must have vanished utterly. She was not much surprised, however, to learn that same evening, that Mrs. Groom, prejudiced woman, had escaped the universal fascination.

The day had been fine, and the evening was balmy.

The Captain, taking Silvia's arm, had led her to the flower-garden, and there whispered mysteriously, whilst he gently nudged her elbow,

"We must leave the lovers alone."

The lovers, as he called them, were walking arm in arm along a shady path.

Silvia looked saucily in the Captain's face, and drawing her arm from his, said demurely:

"I know another pair of lovers who are best alone: the Captain and his pipe."

The Captain began a vehement protest, but Silvia stopped her ears, and ran back to the house. She reached it breathless, and was going upstairs more slowly, with her hand resting on the balusters, when

Mrs. Groom, who had been watching her opportunity, waylaid her. She was coming down as Silvia was going up, and she deliberately stood so as to prevent her further progress.

Without any attempt at preamble, she began—

“We all have our own way,” she said; “mine is to think that some don’t alter. There is one not far from here who has put on a lamb’s skin. It is soft and white, and curly; but I don’t believe in it, *mamzelle*—I don’t believe in it. Now, perhaps, you may think all this does not concern me, and, above all, that I have no business to talk of it to you; but all I do mean to say is this: if you have any money, *mamzelle*, keep it close—keep it close.”

“Mrs. Groom, what makes you say that?” asked Silvia, much surprised.

“I don’t know anything,” continued Mrs. Groom, “but I think I know my gentleman pretty well. He came back for something; it must be for that. The Captain, poor man, thinks he cares naught for money, but he does; he has been dreaming all his life of getting rich, and he’ll bite on that hook. It is no use talking to him, but if you have any money keep it close.”

Silvia shook her head with a half rueful, half mirthful look.

“I am to be very rich,” she said, “but I have no money yet, so I am quite safe. Only, Mrs. Groom, why will you think so badly of Monsieur de l’Epine? It is quite wrong of you.”

“If there is an exasperating thing,” said Mrs. Groom, with remarkable composure of voice and feature, “the most exasperating in my opinion is, that it seems to be no manner of use to see through people. It is always

the wrong person who sees through. Bless you, I might as well be blind for all the harm he can do me; and that's why, I suppose, I do see through him. Yes," thoughtfully added Mrs. Groom, turning away and going down very slowly, "I suppose that is why."

Silvia stood on the broad stone steps, her hand still resting on the iron balusters, looking after Mrs. Groom going down. That warning, coming as it did after the Captain's confidential account of Monsieur de l'Epine's mysterious idea, struck her as significant; but only for a moment. She had nothing to lose as yet—at least she thought so; and gaily shaking her head at Mrs. Groom's advice, she went on till she reached the broad first-floor landing. The house was very quiet just then, and when Silvia opened the door of the drawing-room, and entered the lonely apartment, so grey and still in the light of declining day, with the yellow western sky looking in through the tall windows, she thought she had never seen that room so large, so hushed and so solitary, as it looked then. The white ivory keys of the piano, which she had forgotten to close that morning, gleamed faintly in the doubtful light; everything was sad and indistinct and dim, and Silvia felt vaguely depressed as she sat down to play. She did not know what ailed her, but there was something, a sense of sadness, scarcely strong enough for a presentiment.

Whatever it was, it soon passed away. The Captain, in the joy of his heart, had been whistling an old tune from Rameau the whole day long. Silvia's quick ear had caught it, and she now repeated it to herself with pleasant variations on Madame de l'Epine's piano. And whilst she played, if not with practised skill, at

least very sweetly, the faint impression which Mrs. Groom's warning had left behind it, floated away with the music. She played on, and did not know that a stake dearer to her than money—dearer even than the twenty thousand pounds of which Mr. Fox had brought the tidings, would be risked to her peril by Madame de l'Epine's husband.

Mrs. Groom was right enough. There are few things more disheartening in life than the uselessness of experience and clear-sightedness. That motive of Monsieur de l'Epine's return, which to her was so apparent, his wife and uncle saw not; that plain truth which she whom it concerned not saw so clearly, were both invisible to them whose honour and whose fortunes were at stake. They had been deceived once, they were ready to be deceived again: Love and Faith were arrayed on the traitor's side, and fought for him against these two. He was scarcely prepared for so much credulity. It amused him, and also made him reckless. Instead of that prudent delay he had contemplated, he laid his plans open at once with an audacious candour which was one of his characteristics. Monsieur de l'Epine was the most sincere of schemers, and, just as some animals can only prey on certain others, so was he appointed by nature to deal especially with the ingenuous and the good. With cunning and prudence Monsieur de l'Epine had not the patience to cope. His wife and his father-in-law were the very victims for him—they had been so once, and should be so again; yet, to do him justice, so trifling a lure as the Captain's savings, or the sum which Madame de l'Epine had been able to keep from him, would not have brought him back. It was on learning how Mr.

Lovell, that gentleman of easy temper and large means, was paying Lady John a visit, that Monsieur de l'Epine conceived the brilliant idea of acting the prodigal son. In the exuberance of his repentance, he purposed, indeed, paying Lady John a visit on the very day of his return; but his wife timidly hinted that Lady John was prejudiced, and that it would be better to wait.

"Dear, dear, only think!" said Monsieur de l'Epine with his gay smile; then he sighed and looked penitent, and internally resolved to see Mr. Lovell that very same evening.

CHAPTER V.

AMONGST the illusions of Miss Georgie Lovell concerning herself—and she had many—one of the most hollow was that she could keep a secret. Lamentable mistake! No sooner had she parted from Silvia than her eagerness to worry Lady John and her guests became eagerness to let them know Monsieur de l'Epine's arrival. How they would stare, the whole lot of them! It was delicious to think of it beforehand. So, though the sun was hot, Miss Lovell walked fast, then ran a little, then walked fast again, and was flushed and breathless when she burst into Lady John's drawing-room with the tidings.

"I say," she cried, taking off her hat, and flinging it on the nearest chair in a state of great excitement, "it is Monsieur de l'Epine, you know, come to make it all up, and be such a good boy!"

Lady John stared, amazed. Mrs. Barton said, "Dear me!" Mr. Enfield whistled. Professor Smith puffed out his cheeks portentously, and Mr. Lovell yawned.

"He shan't set his foot inside these doors," cried Lady John, recovering first. "I hate the man. And that old Captain is the greatest fool there ever was."

With this dogmatic assertion Lady John rose, shook her skirts, and walked out of the room.

"I say," unceremoniously giggled Miss Lovell, "Lady John's feathers are up, you know."

No one ventured to answer this very improper remark. In vain Miss Lovell tried to draw them out, and have some fun—they were all cool, guarded, and silent, and dropped off one by one, "to write letters." Mr. Lovell alone remained behind, lolling in a chair, and staring at the wall.

"I say, Gerald," said Miss Lovell, going up to him, "what humbugs they all are!"

"Do drop that word, Georgie," he remarked, kindly; and with that bit of advice he rose and walked out of the room.

Miss Lovell, thus forsaken, took refuge on a couch, and gathering herself up in one of the corners with a heap of cushions behind her, she there looked as sulky and disappointed as a good-tempered, volatile girl can well look.

But news were too rare and too valuable in Lady John's household for this precious bit to be thus dismissed, even by Lady John herself. It was taken up by her ladyship with much spirit after dinner, and there is no denying that poor Monsieur de l'Epine received some rough handling at her fair hands.

"Besides, that old Captain is a fool—I always said so," concluded the irritated lady.

"I wish poor dear Lady John would not excite herself so," whispered Mrs. Barton to Mr. Lovell. "Do

look at her—she is quite flushed. Lady John has a lovely colour, though,” she added, thoughtfully. “Don’t you think so?”

Thus questioned, Mr. Lovell answered that Lady John had a lovely colour.

“I admire Lady John,” continued Mrs. Barton, drawing herself up proudly. “She is a fine woman, Mr. Lovell—a grand woman, in my opinion.”

“Just so.”

“I wish Lady John would marry again,” continued Mrs. Barton.

“She won’t, you know.”

“Well, but she should. Everyone should marry, Mr. Lovell. I do wish Mr. Meredith would marry. I admire Mr. Meredith.”

Mr. Lovell looked sulky, and was silent.

“So handsome,” dreamily continued Mrs. Barton, evidently calling up the absent one’s form and features, “so clever, so amiable, and such a gentleman!” she added, turning triumphantly on Mr. Lovell, who looked more sulky than ever, and said not one word. But Mrs. Barton, who had the gift of blindness, persisted in her praises, till Mr. Lovell, feeling this was a little too much of a bore, left the drawing-room, and went out on the terrace in front of the house, there to smoke a cigar.

Mr. Lovell was not apt to question himself, for self-questioning entails trouble; but on this evening he inquired of that self with which we all commune, why he was to be for ever bored by Mrs. Barton? Mr. Lovell could see no reason for it. Indeed he could not see why he should not leave Lady John’s house altogether, and thus put an end to having Meredith’s praises for

ever dinned in his ear. Mr. Lovell had always fancied he should like going off in a yacht somewhere or other, but had always unaccountably put off doing so. Suppose he should go to Norway! A northern sea, a land of forests, and snowy mountains, and stormy floods, roaring through solitudes, with a yellow twilight over all, were gradually rising before Mr. Lovell's mental vision, and dispelling that state of boredom which was his habitual state, and which having led him to the terrace of Lady John's house, had there induced him to sit on the ledge of the stone balustrade, smoking in a bored sort of way, when a gay voice exclaimed below, in broken English: "By Jove! Mister Lovell!"

"Mister Lovell" looked down and recognized in the path below the handsome face and large figure of his acquaintance, Monsieur de l'Epine, whose bad English had bored him so dreadfully on the Rhine. So to Monsieur de l'Epine's courteously uplifted hat, he answered with a languid "Ah! how de do?" That was the very coolest form of politeness.

"All right," replied Monsieur de l'Epine, showing all his teeth; "not forgotten the English, you see—all right!"

Mr. Lovell looked down at him from his post, and yawned forth "a fine evening," which was the very perfection of polite impertinence.

When the envious critic remarked that, after all, Newton's great discovery was owing to the accidental falling of an apple, Fontenelle shrewdly replied that such accidents only happened to men of genius. So we may doubt whether it was through a stroke of genius or owing to the chance which favours genius that Monsieur de l'Epine now remarked;

"Have you seen my wife's friend?—the young Italian? I cannot find."

"Mademoiselle Nardi!" exclaimed Mr. Lovell, with a sudden liveliness, that said much.

"Yes, Mademoiselle Nardi. My wife want, and cannot find. Have you seen?"

Mr. Lovell had not seen, but he found his tongue, and his legs to go down and give the reply. In a moment he was by Monsieur de l'Epine's side. How was this? What had happened? Mademoiselle Nardi was not missing, surely? Where had she gone? With imperturbable gravity Monsieur de l'Epine replied that Mademoiselle Nardi had vanished after dinner; that the house, the gardens and the grounds having been searched for her in vain, it was supposed that she had wandered forth in one of the lanes in quest of wild flowers, of which Mademoiselle Nardi was imprudently fond, and that whilst his wife and father-in-law were looking in one direction, he had volunteered to search for her in another. The bait took. The temptation of looking for Silvia proved irresistible to Mr. Lovell. Of course he did not share Monsieur de l'Epine's pretended uneasiness concerning the young Italian; but then he had not seen Silvia for some months, and it would be pleasant to see her again. It would also be satisfactory to ascertain on what terms Monsieur de l'Epine was with his wife's friend; for though Mr. Lovell's partiality for Silvia had not been ardent enough to urge him on, and make opportunities when they failed, it was just strong enough for him to feel a lurking jealousy of any young and agreeable man who might come near her; and his good opinion of his Rhine acquaintance was sufficiently weak to make him

consider that his wedded state might prove no objection to one of these flirtations with which the not over-rigid are apt to beguile the tedium of a country life. Thanks to these inducements, he bestowed on Monsieur de l'Epine that favour of his society, which this shrewd gentleman so highly coveted just then. It is needless to say that Silvia, whom Monsieur de l'Epine had left at home, was not found in the lanes when he searched for her with Mr. Lovell. She must have gone home by another road, he said; should they go and try? And half through that indolence which so often made him subservient to the will of others, half through curiosity, Mr. Lovell yielded.

Monsieur de l'Epine, who knew very well where Silvia was to be found, and who wished to see how her personal appearance would act on that phlegmatic Mr. Lovell, suggested that they would reach the château sooner by entering the grounds through a convenient gap of the hawthorn hedge.

"Think so?" languidly replied Mr. Lovell, who rather disliked the idea of having his face scratched or his hair tangled with the briars.

"Yes, think so," eagerly replied Monsieur de l'Epine, repeating his friend's words, under the conviction that he had picked up one of those genuine English idioms like "All right," with which he could garnish his conversation to advantage. And seeing Mr. Lovell's hesitation, he drew back the straggling branches with a vigorous hand, leaving a broad and safe opening between. Mr. Lovell nodded a careless "Thank ye," and passed through; whilst his complaisant friend followed him in, not without sustaining some damage.

"Scratched?" inquired Mr. Lovell, languidly.

"Think so," laughed Monsieur de l'Epine, showing his white teeth, and wiping a drop of blood from his florid face. "This way," he added, entering a path which led to Silvia's favourite haunt, the colonnade. As they went along the little shady avenue, Mr. Lovell yawned, and felt bored at having come. That Monsieur de l'Epine and his English and his careless laugh and his white teeth all bored him dreadfully. He was not even sure that Silvia would not bore him too. He really thought she would; and being too rich and too much accustomed to his own way to stand upon the least ceremony with anyone, he stopped short, and said coolly,

"I think I'll go back."

"Oh! go back," repeated Monsieur de l'Epine, not in the least disconcerted or annoyed; "very well. All right. There she is! Ah! Mademoiselle Nardi," he added, with graceful reproof, "how we have looked for you!"

Silvia, who stood by the little lake which the broken columns enclosed, turned round, and Mr. Lovell lost his wish of going away.

We all are poets and painters, even the least gifted; and Mr. Lovell, spite his indolence, his languor and his carelessness, had a strong sense of colour and beauty within him. To that sense the little picture before him appealed irresistibly. A broad red sweep of strong light from the west lit the gray columns, cedar trees, and quiet water. In that gorgeous glow Silvia stood, and when she turned round and showed them her bright young face, with its look of surprise, Mr.

Lovell was subdued. Well, she was a fine young creature, worth looking at, worth hearing, too, one who roused him from languor into life. His face did not belong to the class called expressive, yet something of his feelings it betrayed, for Monsieur de l'Epine, who had gathered a honeysuckle flower from the hedge, and was observing it idly, smiled as he looked at him through his half-shut eyes. He had the fish and he had the bait; patience, a correct eye, and a firm hand must do the rest. With that marked courtesy in which he never failed towards women, even when they were old, poor, and plain, but which was naturally deeper and more tender to the attractive and the young, Mr. Lovell now addressed Silvia. There was nothing in his polite enquiries concerning her health, and his regret at not having met her for so long a time, but there was much, Monsieur de l'Epine thought, in the rapid blush which passed across her face as she recognized him. Still the blush died away, and her self-possession returned. There had probably been a beginning between these two, but Lady John, or Miss Gray, or Charles Meredith, or something or someone, had interfered, and so the beginning had stood still, and probably, Mr. Lovell's temper being considered, would continue to stand still, if Monsieur de l'Epine did not lend a helping hand. Everyone knows what a good whist player can do, even when plagued with a bad partner. Monsieur de l'Epine, now taking Mr. Lovell as his partner—and a worse one he could not have found in some respects—resolved that *bon gré malgré* he should win the game. So having that talent for intrigue which, like the poetical faculty, is the gift of nature and not the result of art, he now set himself

against Silvia for her wealthy admirer. Alas! the first rounds of the game at least were deplorably easy. Silvia, though shrewd enough in some things, was no match for an antagonist so experienced. She was unsuspicious in the present case, and she was also fond of admiration. That Mr. Lovell admired her, she saw, and, to say the truth, she did not dislike it. So when Monsieur de l'Epine cleverly made her show her satisfaction, and thus bestow a sort of encouragement on her indolent lover, she was quite unconscious that she did it, and that this pleasant good-humoured gentleman, who had such bright eyes and such white teeth, and looked so frank and so careless, made her do it. Indeed, Monsieur de l'Epine was almost too clever, for Mr. Lovell had had such a surfeit of feminine liking and admiration, that to be charmed with him was not exactly the way to win him. Luckily Silvia had that gift of variety which was the source of Cleopatra's power over masculine hearts, and before a quarter of an hour was over, just when Mr. Lovell was beginning to think that though it was very pleasant, it was like the French king's *toujours perdrix*, the wind veered, and, for no apparent reason, Mademoiselle Nardi became suddenly cool and distant. The truth is, that she remembered Lady John, and with the remembrance came the most complete scorn of Mr. Lovell, considered in the light of an admirer. She did not want him, of course she did not, then why stay here talking and laughing with him. Of course he would tell it at Lady John's, and of course that lady would draw her conclusions.

"How chill it is getting!" she said with a little shiver; then, without waiting for either confirmation or

denial, "good evening," she added with a nod, and she walked away.

The change in her manner was so sudden that Mr. Lovell was a little taken by surprise. Monsieur de l'Epine laughed, and taking out a cigar said gaily,

"Pretty, but capricious—eh? Smoke?" he added; for he took it for granted that to suppress as many words as he possibly could was to speak English as it should be spoken.

Mr. Lovell did not answer. He stood looking after Silvia, slightly puzzled and somewhat displeased at the sudden change in her manner. He was unable to account for it by anything he had said or done. Yet he did not think her capricious.

Monsieur de l'Epine, who was watching him, saw the sulky meaning which gathered over his handsome though heavy countenance, and thought this might be the time to strike a sure blow. He leaned against a tree, puffed meditatively at his cigar, then burst into a boisterous, hearty laugh.

"I see," he said—"I see!"

"See what?" sulkily asked Mr. Lovell.

Monsieur de l'Epine took out his cigar, seized Mr. Lovell's button-hole, and looking in his face, said gravely:

"I see why Charles Meredith went away so suddenly!"

And dropping Mr. Lovell, he resumed his cigar, and chuckled to himself in evident enjoyment of Mr. Meredith's discomfiture. Mr. Lovell was not an impressible man, but he could not help colouring violently. There was not, there had never been, any love lost between himself and Charles Meredith. They had always jarred

silently, without ever coming to anything like an open breach. Mr. Lovell was wealthy, and by no means a man of inferior mind or neglected education; but then he had not the brilliant gifts, the handsome person, the charm of manner which Charles Meredith could boast. He was too proud in his way to be envious, but he had been too much courted and flattered not to resent this provoking pre-eminence of a man who unluckily moved in the same circle with himself, and was always, as it were, in his way. It was one of the drawbacks of Ada Gray to Mr. Lovell's favour, that he knew Charles Meredith had not cared to have her, and could probably have had her if he liked. That love would rise between him and Silvia, when they dwelt in the same house, had occurred to Mr. Lovell; and as he could not prevent it, had secretly irritated him. But then he was so languid, so indolent, and also so proud, that this unseen rivalry had failed to sting him into action. He would not enter on a contest in which he felt sure of being beaten. Monsieur de l'Epine's words, however, opened new vistas. Was it possible that Charles Meredith had been foiled by this fittul, wayward Italian girl? And if so, could he, Mr. Lovell, succeed?

There is no denying it. The thought was more alluring than Silvia and her eighteen summers, and her bright smiles and dark eyes. If Charles Meredith had failed to win her, she really became a prize worth wishing for, something it would really repay Mr. Lovell to win. As all this passed through his mind, Monsieur de l'Epine saw that he had at length got a sure and easy hold of that heavy Englishman, whose indolence had so often baffled his efforts. Indeed, he

did not know how true an arrow he had shot. It was at random that he had suggested Charles Meredith's passion for Silvia, and her rejection of him. Had he spoken his real thoughts, either fact would have seemed to him equally improbable. What was there beyond youth and its graces in this dark-eyed girl, that a man of the world should care for her? And how could a penniless young thing reject a prize like Charles Meredith? But the hook was a good one, so far as Mr. Lovell was concerned; Monsieur de l'Epine saw it, and at once changed the conversation.

What resources were there in this out-of-way place? He, Monsieur de l'Epine, already felt horribly dull, and he yawned on the strength of it. It was almost eagerly that Mr. Lovell, the indolent and careless Mr. Lovell, responded to this opening, which promised continued intercourse with Silvia.

"There is boating," he said. "Capital boating."

"Ah! boating! Capital, too. All right."

"Yes, on the little river that flows through the forest, you know."

Monsieur de l'Epine knew, and was all eagerness for boating. Had Mr. Lovell got a boat? Could they get a boat? One large enough to accommodate the ladies, for Monsieur de l'Epine was too fond a husband to go boating without his wife.

"I shall see about it," replied Mr. Lovell, readily, "and—and—I shall have the pleasure of calling on Madame de l'Epine to-morrow."

This was telling Monsieur de l'Epine pretty plainly that he was not to go to Lady John's house; and so Monsieur de l'Epine took it, for with a good-humoured smile, that showed all his handsome teeth, he shook

Mr. Lovell's rather passive hand, and parted from him with a hearty "All right."

CHAPTER VI.

THE Captain had a little room on the ground-floor, which was pompously called "Monsieur's Cabinet," or "Monsieur's Fumoir," or, again, "Monsieur's Atelier," but which was exclusively devoted to his personal use. He smoked here, he studied tactics here, and he slept here in a deep leather armchair. He was sleeping now, with a laurelled bust of Cæsar looking at him sternly from the top of his bureau, and a little sparrow boldly pecking the crumbs which the Captain's hand had scattered on the ledge of the open window. Now and then the bird stretched its slender throat and peeped in at the Captain, looking at him mistrustfully with its little bright black eye, but the Captain's slumbers were as sound and deep as his dreams were pleasant.

The Captain dreamed that he was surrounded by grandchildren, rosy, blue-eyed cherubs, all clamorous for bonbons, and putting his hand in a lovely bag of pink glacé paper, the Captain was drawing forth, not bonbons, but Napoleons bright, new and shining, every one of which, instead of the Imperial effigy, was inscribed with "Mineral Oil." These he was giving away with a liberal hand, and the more he gave the more he had to bestow, when a perverse fly lit on his nose and woke him. He opened his eyes, sat up, and saw his daughter standing on the threshold of the room, with her hand resting on the lock of the door, as if she did not know whether to advance or to retreat.

Involuntarily, perhaps, the Captain glanced towards his bureau, on which papers covered with figures were scattered; and pushing them away out of sight, he uttered an anxious—

“My dear, what is the matter?”

“May I speak to you?” asked Joséphine.

“Certainly, but not here. I have been smoking, and the room will make you ill.”

“Not for a few moments,” she said, taking a chair.

The Captain moved his chair as far away from his bureau as he well could.

His daughter saw it, and she knew why he did this; but, as if she had seen and understood nothing, she said gently:

“My dear father, I must speak to you again. I am really very anxious about this matter of the mineral oil.”

“You need not burn any, my dear,” he replied, wilfully misunderstanding her.

“That is not my meaning,” she said, still very gently. “My fear is, that Louis may be deceiving himself as to the profits any undertaking connected with that oil may yield.”

“Louis knows what he is about, Joséphine.”

“Yes, but the risk is not his own merely. I fear he may involuntarily deceive Mr. Lovell, who seems so taken up with that idea. I fear it more—oh! far more than I can tell.”

She did not say she feared the Captain too might be deceived, because it was this good gentleman’s weak point that he never could be deceived or mistaken; but she might as well have spoken plainly. Her father be-

came very red, and laughed a short, irritated, constrained laugh.

“Why not say at once you are afraid I should be deceived as well as Mr. Lovell?” he replied. “I thought you knew your old father better, Joséphine. You might indeed think that Louis has no head for business, though he has—a fine head, a wonderful head, a grand head!” he went on, warming with his subject; “still, he might be mistaken. But that I, an old soldier, who have been tossed like a ball about the world for sixty-five years, that I should be deceived and help to deceive Mr. Lovell in a matter like this is simply absurd, my dear child. Why, it is more than absurd,” said the Captain, again warming with his subject—“it is abominably ridiculous. Deceive me, indeed!—ha! ha!”

And in the exuberance of his amusement at his daughter’s egregious mistake, the Captain laughed boisterously.

“What so funny, eh?” asked Monsieur de l’Epine, looking in at them through the open window. He was smiling, but there was mistrust in his blue eyes. Madame de l’Epine blushed a little, and the Captain became grave.

“A woman, Louis, a real woman,” he said, pinching his daughter’s thin cheeks; “but a good one, eh?”

“Too good for me,” replied his son-in-law, shaking his head over his own failings—“too good, a great deal.”

Madame de l’Epine looked at them both. She was powerless, she saw it, and with a sigh she left them.

Slowly and heavily she went upstairs. Her brief

dream of happiness was melting away very fast. The fair vision, the enchanted gardens, the lovely cities of that Fata Morgana were now mere outlines, indistinct and dim, and through their unsubstantial texture she saw already the dull blank sea on which she had been drifting since her marriage-day. Monsieur de l'Epine was rather a schemer than an accomplished dissembler. He had soon wearied of the part he was acting, and, so far as his wife was concerned, quietly put it by after a few days. Joséphine could not tax him with unkindness—that, indeed, he had never shown in any active shape; but little by little the old careless neglect crept in, and once more divided them. She saw it, she felt it, and she also felt and knew that he had had some unacknowledged object in coming back.

She did not reach this bitter conclusion without struggling hard against it. She tried to deceive herself, to shut her eyes, and not see what was but too apparent; and for a while, at least, she succeeded in putting off the evil hour. But when her husband sought her society less and less, and the Captain's and Mr. Lovell's more and more—when she ascertained that their conversation ran chiefly on business matters, from the exact knowledge of which she was excluded even by her father, deep uneasiness was added to pain. And yet she did not see the matter as it was, perhaps she could not, and perhaps, too, she would not. Her husband had been reckless and extravagant, but she had faith in his honour. She only feared he might be imprudent, and pledge himself, and lead others too far. She tried to utter a few subdued words of warning to her father—to suggest a doubt; but never, alas! was a well-meant attempt more unsuccessful than this. The

Captain did not heed her, and only grew more stubborn with opposition. He also became more secretive, and when, as the danger seemed to increase, she sought him on purpose to speak more openly, her father laughed at her, and she read suspicion in her husband's eye.

"It is too late," she thought, as she left them both, and went up, sad and weary, to the drawing-room. "It is too late, and even had I spoken before it would still have been too late."

She thought to find the drawing-room vacant, but it was not. Silvia stood in the central window, half hidden by one of the heavy curtains, and from this post of observation peeping down on the terrace below. Madame de l'Epine stood still; the scent of cigars was coming up from the terrace, and with it also came the Captain's hearty bass voice, her husband's gay laugh, and Mr. Lovell's languid tones. And Silvia was looking at and listening to them, herself, as she thought, unseen. The western glow shone on her bright young face and slender figure, and there was a charm in the unconscious grace of her attitude; but a pang shot through the heart of her friend as, standing still near the door, she thence looked at her.

Spite all she dreaded, she kept that faith in her husband's honour which was to her what his knowledge of life was to the poor Captain. But though she would not doubt that Monsieur de l'Epine's end was honest, she was forced to see that his means were neither delicate nor scrupulous. Yes, she saw it, and it cut her to the heart; he used that young girl, her friend, the one whom her brother had secretly chosen for his own, he used her as a bait wherewith to secure the languid,

indolent Mr. Lovell. And oh! how Silvia abetted him! How she let herself be silently looked at and admired! How she received Mr. Lovell's tacit love-making as a matter of course; not seeking it, indeed, but never fairly repelling it, and evidently liking it. Joséphine's heart ached doubly at all this. It ached because Charles Meredith was fast losing his loved one whilst he was away, and it ached most of all because in her husband's unworthy part she read his long-cherished dislike against her brother.

"What are you looking at, Silvia?" she asked, coming up to her, and gently laying her hand on the young girl's shoulder.

Mademoiselle Nardi turned round with a little conscious start and blush, but said readily enough:

"I wonder if they will soon have done smoking—I want a little boating."

There had been a great deal of boating for the last ten days; but boating to which no ladies, save Madame de l'Epine and her friend, were admitted. Miss Georgie Lovell had tried hard to be one of the party; but, to her great vexation, had been denied, on the plea that the boat could not possibly hold her without danger.

Coaxing and worrying had failed equally; Miss Lovell had been loud in her complaints, and had favoured Lady John with some bitter comments on Mr. Lovell's ill-nature, and Madame de l'Epine's and Silvia's grasping disposition.

"My dear," angrily replied Lady John, "I always saw through Mademoiselle Nardi: she is the most audacious little flirt I ever did see."

"Oh! I don't mind her marrying Gerald, if that is what she wants," impatiently replied Miss Lovell, "but

I do think it so selfish to keep all the boating to herself. Besides, I always did wish to try my hand at an oar," added Miss Lovell, raising that mighty limb, her right arm, and surveying it and its plump little bit of a hand with great complacency. "But it's all that sly Madame de l'Epine's doing," she added, "I know it is."

Poor Madame de l'Epine! though unconscious of Miss Lovell's severe strictures, she had done all she could to interfere with this new fancy of Silvia's; and on this evening, displeased and alarmed at the flirtation—for she did not think it more—which was going on between Mr. Lovell and her young friend, she resolved to keep her within.

"I am not very well," she said with perfect truth, for she was never well; "I fear I cannot join you."

Silvia looked blank and disappointed, but she also looked so sorry for her friend, and her inquiries were so anxious, that Madame de l'Epine was a little ashamed of her subterfuge. Her object, however, was obtained. At once Silvia stepped out on the balcony and told the gentlemen they must go without them, for that Madame de l'Epine was unwell, and that she would remain at home with her.

On hearing this, Monsieur de l'Epine was so full of concern for his dear wife that he would come up and sit by her side, clasping her hand in his. He was so tender and so fond, and so confidential too, that Silvia after a while left them.

"She is gone down to the garden," thought Joséphine, "and my father, who is as innocent as a baby, will wander away smoking his pipe, and leave her

alone with Mr. Lovell. And Mr. Lovell, who will never make up his mind to love or to marry a woman until he finds one who asks him, will stare at her a great deal, and flatter her a little, and she will like it, and Charles will be wronged, and no one the better or the happier for it."

"I am sorry I gave up the boating," she said to her husband after a while, "the air might have done me good. Is it too late to go?"

Monsieur de l'Epine replied with the greatest alacrity that it was not too late, and they went down at once to the garden, where matters were going on pretty much as Madame de l'Epine had suspected. The Captain had wandered a little away with his beloved pipe, Silvia was flitting about the flower-garden, and Mr. Lovell was sitting on a bench looking at her and pulling his whiskers in blissful contemplation. He received with great equanimity the announcement that Madame de l'Epine was now equal to the boating, but smiled when Silvia exclaimed joyfully:

"I am sure it will do you good. It is so pleasant in the boat on the river."

"We shall go to the island, if you are equal to so long an expedition," said the Captain, joining them.

Madame de l'Epine sighed.

She was equal to anything, for she felt it with keen regret she could prevent nothing.

Silvia was very merry, and chatted all the way. She looked as light-hearted as if such a being as Charles Meredith had never existed.

"Has she ever cared for him?" thought Madame de l'Epine, with sad wonder.

Not far from the end of the garden, at the entrance of the forest, a streamlet sprang from beneath some rocks. Cool and dark it flowed for a while on its pebbly bed, then, fed by invisible tributaries, it suddenly became an impetuous little river, which passed through the gloomy forest shade, till coming out in the open country, it spread quietly between green sedgy banks, and watered a fair pastoral land.

The boat which Mr. Lovell had hired for Silvia's pleasure lay moored in a little creek, near which rose the cottage of its owner.

"And we are going to the island!" cried Silvia, joyously, as she entered it; "I like an island of all things."

"So do I," replied the Captain. "Robinson Crusoe and Sancho Panza always come up to my mind when I hear the word. Ah! what a fellow that Robinson was!"

Silvia questioned; for being very ignorant, poor little soul, she had never read, never heard of Robinson Crusoe. She was eager and interested, and full of ardour about Robinson's fortunes; and Mr. Lovell thought how delightful it was to have to do with a girl who had read nothing, as it were, and yet who was a lady.

The evening was calm and fair, and the little river looked almost still as a lake in the red and yellow light of the setting sun. The poplars on its banks nodded gently, looking as if they were just ready to fall asleep, said Silvia; and deep, cool shadows lurked in the rushy nooks on either side. Rowed by the men, the boat sped on swiftly, till a little wooded is-

land, where birch and aspen trees made a pleasant shade, was reached.

This island, when visited, proved to be no more than a narrow strip of land, with here and there a clump of trees. A lonely cow, who was grazing quietly, raised her brown head on seeing them, and fastening her full dark eyes on Silvia, began lowing very lamentably. Madame de l'Epine sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, hoping that Silvia would sit by her; but the young girl was intent first on the cow, then on wild flowers, which she began gathering; and Mr. Lovell after a while joined her. Seeing this, Monsieur de l'Epine tenderly sat by his wife's side. The Captain was walking up and down, with his hands in his pockets, looking, as he felt, the happiest of men. It did not take much to make the good Captain happy. But just then he felt more than usually blest. In the first place, he had proved his sagacity in finding out the excellence of his son-in-law's scheme concerning mineral oil; and in the second, thanks to that scheme and the capital he was embarking in it, the Captain already saw himself at the head of a handsome competency.

"It stands to reason," thought the Captain, smoking; "suppose even only ten individuals per cent. in all France should choose to burn this new oil; let us reckon the population at thirty millions, round numbers—viz., three hundred thousand consumers, if there be any truth in arithmetic. Now, the profits on each consumer being say five francs yearly, we have the handsome sum of one million and a half of francs—at least one or two hundred thousand for

my share; or rather for my dear Joséphine and her children."

Here Mr. Lovell came back with Silvia, and Monsieur de l'Epine immediately left his wife and joined his father-in-law and that gentleman.

"Well?" he asked; "all clear, eh?"

"Beautifully clear!" heartily replied the Captain; "eh, Mr. Lovell?"

Mr. Lovell answered that it was clear.

"Well, I do think it is," resumed Monsieur de l'Epine; "clear and sure. Mineral oil is a new thing, and there is always a run upon new things. Then the supply is unbounded. It flows and flows, and pours and pours."

"And never stops," suggested Mr. Lovell.

"Never," was the cool reply.

Mr. Lovell did not care to argue the matter. When the oil stopped, why, he should stop too, and there would be an end to that bore.

"It gives a bright, clear light," continued Monsieur de l'Epine; "it costs very little money—it is sure to be popular——"

"I tell you, ninety-nine per cent. will burn mineral oil," burst in the Captain, striking the earth with his cane.

"No, no, not ninety-nine per cent.," corrected his nephew; "but say twenty, perhaps even thirty, or thirty-one, or thirty with a fraction, not to exaggerate; but we have not decided yet whether we shall or not refine it ourselves."

"Let us refine it by all means," eagerly cried the Captain. "It is a grand thing. I have seen it done. You have your mineral oil black as ink, thick as

tar—well, then, you distil it, and turn it into clear, pale oil, into lovely wax candles, into naphtha, into——”

“But don’t you want works and people and machinery, and all that sort of thing?” interrupted Mr. Lovell, pulling his whiskers.

“Of course you do—grand works, sir, splendid works, covering acres and acres with hundreds and hundreds of people about them.”

“Oh! don’t let us have that bore,” yawned Mr. Lovell; “we should be sure to get taken in by the people, you know. Let us have it ready made, or purified, or refined, or whatever it may be, from America or Canada, or that sort of place, you know.”

The Captain looked blank. He longed for the works, and the distilling and the smoke, and the furnaces; and also, to be candid, he longed to extract from the mineral oil all the profits that could possibly be squeezed out of it; and he would certainly have had a battle on this subject, if he had not remembered that as the works would probably be in America, his point, if carried, might again separate his daughter from her husband. So he was silent, whilst his son-in-law, who had never argued or insisted on any one point in this matter from the beginning, said with graceful acquiescence,

“Mister Lovell is right. Get it all ready—all right. Only think to be sharp with that Mr. Reed who sells the what-d’ye-call’-em-thing to us. Let us be sharp, and not taken in, you know,” continued Monsieur de l’Epine, laying his forefinger to his nose and looking knowing.

They all agreed that they must be sharp, and must not be taken in.

"Sharp fellow Mr. Reed," continued Monsieur de l'Epine, "but I shall look after him. English, you know. Have him under English law when I want him."

"Law is a great bore," remarked Mr. Lovell.

"Requisite," replied the Captain, shaking his head solemnly, "requisite, sir. No doing without law in this world of cheats. Well, then, that Mr. Reed sends us the oil. We receive it at Havre."

"Shall I go over the calculations again?" put in Monsieur de l'Epine, taking out his pocket-book.

"Well, perhaps we had better," eagerly replied the Captain, to whom all this talking of money was sweet and musical as the handling of napoleons; and taking out his pocket-book too, he seized his pencil and began reading over, in a purring, business voice: "Oil prime cost, so much; oil freight, so much; oil duty, so much; oil carriage, so much; oil warehousing, so much; now, my dear boy," he added exuberantly, "if you will just give me the figures, I am ready, so fire away!"

"Just so," said Monsieur de l'Epine; and glancing over his pocket-book, he was going to enter on the calculations for the hundredth time, when Mr. Lovell interfered.

"Don't please," he said languidly, "it is getting such an awful bore of a thing that mineral oil."

The Captain looked blank again, but Monsieur de l'Epine politely put up his pocket-book.

"Besides," continued Mr. Lovell, who looked ready to yawn, "we have done the calculations ever so often, you know."

"So we have," promptly said Monsieur de l'Epine, "so we have. Only if you were not quite satisfied."

"Oh! dear, yes, quite," interrupted Mr. Lovell, "it is to be ten, or twenty, or fifteen per cent. profit, is it not? Well, then," he added, stretching himself with evident weariness, "it is all right."

"Still it would be more satisfactory—" began the Captain.

"Oh! dear no," coolly put in Mr. Lovell, "I get muddled when I go too often over these sort of things."

As the calculations had really been gone through again and again, and as the Captain was a most good-natured man, he gave in, and put up his pocket-book; but pursing up his lips, he remarked with a look of much importance,

"Still we must regularize, Mr. Lovell—we must regularize."

"Mr. Lovell raised his eyebrows, and internally wondered what new bore was this.

"Yes," said Monsieur de l'Epine, nodding gravely, "we must regularize."

The two gentlemen explained their meaning. There must be more than a verbal agreement between them. The law must be called in to fix the exact amount of thousands that was to come in to each from the expected profits which the mineral oil was to yield. Mr. Lovell, who found the chief portion of the requisite capital, was to get the lion's share in the returns, and do no more than he pleased to do. The Captain's savings were also invested in this concern, to which he brought as well his wide experience of business-life, and human nature, and he too was to get a large percentage. Instead of money Monsieur de l'Epine contributed "his ideas, zeal, and intelligence." The exact

amount he was to have in return for these was not yet specified, but it was to be something handsome. Now, by regularizing, Monsieur de l'Epine meant that all these matters were to be determined and settled in the clearest and especially in the most stringent manner.

"As I am to have the managing of this matter," he said, "and the handling of the money, I wish to be bound and tied and secured as rigorously as the law will allow. I beg that no one will object, as on this point I am quite determined."

This was said with some asperity, yet Mr. Lovell, to do him justice, raised no sort of objection to binding his present friends, or the absent Mr. Reed, or anyone connected with a matter in which he risked his money. Silvia's presence had first allured him to the château, but Monsieur de l'Epine's scheme had attracted him too. He was a rich man, yet he had gone through the bore of endless calculations and conversations about mineral oil, in order to add to his wealth, and get high interest on his money, instead of a paltry two or three, or even five per cent. He was also quite willing to go through the other bore of regularising, as they called it, and keeping a firm hold on his friend Monsieur de l'Epine. So a journey to Paris for that purpose was agreed forthwith between these three.

With breathless interest Madame de l'Epine had looked at them as they walked up and down the sward. She guessed that they were talking of the mineral oil, and it was as if she knew that in that scheme for making money her own fate lay wrapped. She sat on the trunk of the fallen tree, her hands clasped on her lap, her eyes fastened alternately on the Captain, her husband, and Mr. Lovell. Oh! if she could but have per-

suaded her dear father that by thus striving to become a richer man, he would only add to her sorrows! If she could have won back her husband from his imprudent ventures, and convinced him of the peace which lies in calm happiness—if she could even have said to Mr. Lovell, “You have money enough, seek not for more!” what a relief it would have been. But she was tongue-tied. We all have passed through that dire necessity of silence or passivity, and we all know how trying it can be. It is one of the hardships of life, unacknowledged, indeed, but none the less sad and bitter.

Inexperience and careless trust guarded Silvia from that sorrow. She sat by the side of her friend, holding her wild flowers in her hand, and looking at the little river, in which the poplar-trees shivered against the fading red of an evening sky, and Silvia felt vexed and angry with Mr. Meredith. He had only written once to his sister since he had left, and she was convinced that he had done this to punish her. She did not care about Monsieur de l’Epine and mineral oil and Mr. Lovell, and she did not suspect that either mineral oil or they could have any influence over her destiny, and Mr. Meredith’s affections.

So we pass through life, looking at remote evils, and never seeing those close at hand, which, though unheeded, are to be so disastrous.

“If I get my twenty thousand pounds,” thought Silvia, whose heart felt very full this evening, though she looked so careless, “I shall go back to Italy, and settle there with Dom Sabino and his sister in Sorrento. I will not stay here, to be taken up and put by again at Mr. Meredith’s caprice. I will not!”

"Are you chill, my dear?" asked the Captain, coming up to his daughter. "Shall we go home?"

"Yes," she quietly replied, "let us go home, if you please."

They entered the boat again, and it was when it glided softly on the still waters, that the Captain, clearing his throat with a little cough, said, with an assumption of easy carelessness, which sat very ill upon him,

"We are all three going to Paris to-morrow, ladies; have you any commands for us?"

"You are going, Louis?" said Madame de l'Epine, and her voice seemed choking with tears as she addressed her husband.

"For a few days, my love," he coolly answered.

Silvia turned to Mr. Lovell, and looked at him with such surprise, that he felt bound to say something. He accordingly muttered that it was a great bore, but that they must regularize.

"And when we have all regularized we shall all come back," gaily said the Captain.

Madame de l'Epine said nothing, and Silvia, tossing her flowers in the water, pouted. She did not care for Mr. Lovell, no more than for the flowers she had thus thrown away, but she did not want Mr. Lovell to go to Paris. His admiration amused her, and she began to think very poorly of Monsieur de l'Epine, and to look on the mineral oil scheme with an unfriendly eye.

After a while Madame de l'Epine spoke:

"I suppose it is too late for me to interfere," she said sadly, "and yet I cannot help doing so. It seems to me such a pity, my dear father, that you should

wish to become rich. Money brings a world of cares, and we have plenty, more than enough."

"More than enough!" indignantly interrupted the Captain; "and if you should have a family—a large family?" he emphatically added. "Why, my aunt was ten years childless, and then had a baby every year for seven years running; and her husband, who had calculated that they had plenty to live upon, was obliged to go into business."

"And thus he lost all he had. Pray remember that."

"And why did he lose it? Because not having provided beforehand for these seven babies, he was imprudent and speculated rashly," retorted the prudent Captain. "Therefore do I take it in time."

Madame de l'Epine was silenced, and, indeed, spoke no more till they left the boat. Mr. Lovell parted from them in the forest.

"Good-bye, Mademoiselle Nardi," he said, with something like tenderness in his voice, and detaining her whilst Madame de l'Epine walked on. "I shall not see you again before we leave."

"Oh! good-bye, Mr. Lovell," she composedly answered; "a pleasant journey to you."

And with a careless nod she went on, nor once looked back.

The moon had risen, and lit the path with a soft, faint light. The air was mild, and the night serene; but Silvia was too much elated at having proved her indifference to Mr. Lovell to heed its beauty. She walked on briskly, and was soon by Madame de l'Epine's side. She found her standing near a tree, leaning against it and moaning like one in pain.

“Joséphine, what is it?” cried Silvia, sobered at once.

“I shall never see him again,” said Madame de l’Epine, with a passion very unusual in her—“never, never!”

Silvia was too much dismayed to speak; she had no time to do so, moreover, for the Captain and his nephew were coming, and Madame de l’Epine, suddenly recovering her calmness, went on. She complained of headache on reaching the château, and at once retired to her own apartment. Silvia, not caring to trouble the gentlemen with her company, yet feeling unable to hold her tongue, went up to Mrs. Groom’s room. She found Mrs. Groom sewing near a little round table, on which her lamp stood; the window was open; the moon hung above the forest trees, and a distant nightingale was warbling very sweetly; but Silvia felt disturbed and unhappy.

“Mrs. Groom,” she said, throwing herself in a chair and looking gloomy, “I am afraid that, spite his white teeth and his pleasant laugh, a certain gentleman is not good.”

“Oh! you have found it out, have you?” ironically replied Mrs. Groom, sewing on.

“I have been finding it out these ten days,” sententiously rejoined Silvia. “At first the bottle was full—oh! so full; then some of the wine oozed out; then more, and to-night, Mrs. Groom, the bottle is quite empty.”

“When is he going?” asked Mrs. Groom.

“How do you know that he is going?” cried Silvia startled.

Pity not unmixed with contempt appeared on Mrs. Groom's brown face.

"Don't I know him, the white-toothed rascal?" she answered; "don't I know how and why he brought that Mr. Lovell here?—and don't you, mamzelle?"

Silvia heard her in sudden dismay. Small signs and tokens came back with a significance unheeded till then. In a moment she seemed to see, as in a mirror, how she had been made subservient to Monsieur de l'Epine's designs.

"I detest him!" she cried, turning crimson and half starting from her chair.

"Do you, mamzelle? Well, don't fret. If he goes away you will not see him again in a hurry."

Silvia sank back in her chair and was silent. She looked at the housekeeper, on whose brown face the light from the lamp shone, and who was working steadily by its quiet flame, at the old-fashioned, precise yet comfortable furniture around her, and she felt angry with Mrs. Groom for being able to see such bitter unpleasant truths, and with Mrs. Groom's room for being so heartless and matter-of-fact. She was angry with Monsieur de l'Epine, too, and still more angry, if she had but known it, with life. It is depressing to the young to think of such things as treachery and feigned love. These are more dreary to them than to older journeyers along the path of life. Their elders submit, if not with a good grace, at least resignedly, for they have got used to pay that sad reckoning at many an inn. So when Silvia almost passionately said: "I shall never believe in any one again!" Mrs. Groom answered very coolly: "Won't you, mamzelle?" And Mrs. Groom had her own thoughts, and brooded over the misdeeds

of her Philip.. "Whom I made so much of, and who has turned out so ill," thought Mrs. Groom, with a sore and heavy heart.

CHAPTER VII.

GREAT was Lady John's surprise and indignation when, with that word which explains nothing, "business," Mr. Lovell informed her ladyship, on joining her and her friends that same evening, that he was going to Paris early the next morning.

"Oh! indeed," exclaimed Lady John, looking extremely black; whilst Miss Georgie Lovell stared at her cousin in mute dismay.

"What shall I bring you, Georgie?" he asked, rather kindly, "chocolate?"

"I am afraid I have outgrown chocolate," was the despondent reply. "I seem to outgrow everything. Besides, where's the use of chocolate when one can never have one's own way?" she added, with a gloomy reference to the boating, which Mr. Lovell ignored. But spite her masculine propensities, Miss Georgie had a sweet tooth, so, before the evening was over, she sidled up to her cousin, and said confidentially,

"Do as you like about the chocolate, you know."

But no chocolate, even if Mr. Lovell had offered to bring her any, could have appeased Lady John's displeasure. "Business!" she said to Professor Smith, "and what business can Mr. Lovell have? Then you know that though, when he does come, he never knows when to go away, yet, when he is gone, there is no getting him back. That Monsieur de l'Epine is

at the bottom of it all. I detest him!" she added, vehemently; "and I am the more vexed about it that Ada is coming."

Professor Smith attempted consolation; but Lady John would not be comforted.

"You know that all my rooms are empty," she said, in the tone of an injured hotel-keeper. "Mr. Enfield is going, Mr. Lovell is gone, and who is coming, save Ada? So great and so visible was her ladyship's annoyance at Mr. Lovell's departure, and indeed for several days after it, that all Mrs. Barton's sympathy was roused, and she went about the house pitying Lady John. "It was so good and hospitable of her to take it so. But hospitality was quite a feature in her character. A beautiful character, a lovely character—so unselfish, so amiable. It really was a pity that poor dear Lady John should be tried so."

To repair so great an error, Fortune, who is not always blind and unkind, provided for Lady John comfort which neither she nor her friends expected. They were all sitting in the drawing-room a week after Mr. Lovell's departure; Miss Lovell was curled up in a corner of the sofa, nibbling some *pastilles de chocolat*, which had come that morning with a kind little note from her cousin, promising a further supply; but though the pastilles were delicious, Miss Lovell felt cross. In the first place, she found Lady John and her friends "slow;" in the second, she was put out because, having called on Silvia twice that day, in order to persuade her into having some independent boating of their own, she had neither time found her within; and thirdly, Miss Lovell was annoyed because Lady John,

Professor Smith, Mrs. Barton, and Mr. Enfield, were now playing whist, which she, Miss Lovell, abominated.

The whist-table, however, was rather stormy. Mr. Enfield and Mrs. Barton had all the trumps, and Lady John held a very bad hand. This added to her wrath against the absent Mr. Lovell, which Professor Smith's bad play raised to a climax. How could he lead spades when he knew she had neither trumps nor spades? In vain Professor Smith protested "that he did not know." Lady John dropped her eyelids at him, and declared it was too bad of Mr. Lovell to go away so.

"He knows I could have had an African traveller if he had not agreed to stay," said Lady John; "and now of course I must do without. I have a particular liking for African travellers," she continued, warming with a sense of her wrongs. "I have already had two who were the most amusing creatures, and it is really too bad of Mr. Lovell—much too bad."

"I feel sure Mr. Lovell will soon come back," began Professor Smith.

"Well, but you need not have led spades, when you knew I had neither spades nor trumps," was Lady John's very unexpected rejoinder to this consolatory speech.

There is no knowing how Professor Smith would have met this home-thrust, if a discreet tap at the door, followed by the appearance of Parker, Lady John's decorous English man-servant, had not put an end to the conversation.

Parker's looks were wild and scared, and his speech was confused and broken.

"Did Lady John, did her ladyship know? He

thought he would come and tell her ladyship in case she did not know."

"Know what?" impatiently asked his mistress.

"Oh! nothing particular. Only he thought her ladyship would like to know that the ladies at the 'chatow' were safe, and that the 'chatow' was all in a blaze of fire."

Here was a Godsend for Lady John. Spades led when she had none, Mr. Lovell's desertion, and the loss of the African traveller, were forgotten in this new prize. Such a chance as the burning down of a friend's house is a rare one in a country life.

Lady John rose, all eagerness and excitement; Miss Lovell threw away the pastilles, and jumped off the sofa, and in a moment the whist-table was deserted.

"Are the engines come?" cried Mr. Enfield, "shall I run for the engines?"

"I say, Lady John, we shall bring them all home, you know!" eagerly put in Miss Lovell, delighted at the idea of having some company.

What Professor Smith and Mrs. Barton said has not been recorded, for the imperative voice of Lady John, ordering Parker to attend her forthwith with a lantern, drowned every sound. In a few minutes they were all ready, and Lady John rushed off to the scene of the catastrophe in the highest glee and good-humour, followed by her friends.

"I am very sorry for poor Madame de l'Epine," said Lady John, tripping along the dark road, "but she is insured, of course, and since the château was to be burned down, I am very glad I can see it. Would you believe, Professor Smith, that I never did see a real, good, genuine fire!"

Professor Smith expressed himself happy to think that so unfortunate a vacuum in Lady John's experience was going to be supplied; and the ominous redness which appeared in the sky, left no doubt that the fire which was consuming Madame de l'Epine's home was a very genuine fire indeed.

Long before they reached the château, Parker's lantern had become useless. When they entered the village street they found it lit as in broad day; but silent and deserted. The little grey church was now blood-red, and looked as unearthly as a church in a ghost story. Even the front of Jean Varot's gloomy inn was bright and clear, and Lady John could see Madame Varot standing on the threshold of the door with a scared aspect.

"Where is Jean Varot?" asked Lady John, stopping short.

"Oh! he has been gone weeks," eagerly replied Madeleine, "weeks. You know it began in the kitchen," she added earnestly; "it is accident—nothing but accident."

"My goodness!" cried Lady John to Professor Smith, "if it were not accident! And of course it is not!" she added triumphantly, "of course some one must have set fire to the château on purpose."

Before the Professor could suggest a doubt, a bright tongue of flame which shot up in the sky changed the current of Lady John's thoughts.

"Bless me!" she cried, in sudden alarm, "do make haste, Professor Smith, or we shall be late!"

The fire was at its height when they reached the château, and the sight which met them when they turned the corner of the path, and came in front of

the burning pile, was a grand one indeed. Before them rose a sheet of fire, with here and there a glimpse of stone wall, and a dark gap of window. Every tree, every shrub, every blade of grass was distinctly visible in the lurid light which shone on the upturned faces of the crowd.

The Curé was there in his black cossack, and the Maire had thought proper to put on his tricolour scarf. The firemen were flitting to and fro with their shining helmets, for they had brought to bear the might of their little engine on the blazing mass.

Madame de l'Epine, Silvia, Mrs. Groom, and the female servants, stood in a group apart. Near them was a confused heap of such furniture as had already been rescued from the flames, and which men were removing to the farm. Miss Georgie Lovell clapped her hands in great glee.

"Now, isn't that fun?" she said, candidly, and at once she joined the firemen. "You just turn your squirt this way, will you?" she said, authoritatively. "Don't you see the worst of the fire is here, not there?"

One of the firemen turned round and looked at her in prolonged amazement.

"*Ma foi!*" he exclaimed, "I thought our Captain's voice was cracked till I saw the petticoats. Take care our squirt does not water you, Mademoiselle."

"And I say——" began Miss Lovell.

"My dear child," gently said the Curé, "you are in the way."

Miss Lovell was going to make a tart answer, when the Captain of the firemen, who was a rough peasant, uttered a rolling French oath, with plenty of *rr*'s in it,

and taking her under the arms, lifted her up, and carried her away in a twinkling.

"Now, little girl," he said, putting her down near the group of her friends, "the next time you come near my men I shall kiss you."

Miss Lovell, in a great rage at this treatment, flew to the Maire.

"Monsieur Laurent," she said, "that fireman is a wretch!"

"Indeed! May I ask how so?" replied Monsieur Laurent, with a smile.

He listened to her breathless account of the transaction, smiled again at the Captain's threat, then, smoothing his own silky moustache, said blandly: "The Captain does not shave every day, Mademoiselle—better keep out of his way."

And with a graceful wave of his hand he went back to the fire. Thus left to smoothe her ruffled feathers as best she might, Miss Georgie Lovell, not being allowed to direct the firemen, or display her universal genius in that way, at last joined Madame de l'Epine and Silvia. She found Lady John pressing them eagerly to take refuge with her that very night.

"How can you go to the farm," she said, positively, "when it is crammed with furniture? You must come to us. Mr. Lovell is gone, Mr. Enfield talks of going; we have plenty of room."

"You are very kind," answered Madame de l'Epine, with evident hesitation; "but all is not over. Another engine has been sent for, and if it comes in time the left wing of the château can still be saved—for, as you see, it has escaped as yet."

"So it has," replied Lady John, somewhat disap-

pointed; for, as she said later, "of course, if the left wing had been burning too, the fire would have been so much finer."

But that gratification was denied to Lady John. Mr. Enfield, all zeal and ardour, now rushed up to her with the tidings that the second engine was coming at full gallop.

"Is it? Well, Mr. Enfield, have you been making an engine of yourself, that you are so wet?" asked Lady John, crossly.

"Oh! Professor Smith and I have been working very hard indeed; but he is *hors de combat*, I believe."

Lady John's keen eyes soon detected the poor Professor, who sat on a heap of stones wiping his moist brow.

"Well, Professor Smith," she exclaimed, going up to him, "in what pie have you been putting your finger now? Will you tell me why you are all wet, sir?"

"I was pressed. Did you not miss me? I was pressed at once. However, the Maire, seeing the state I was in, kindly released me."

"And where is Miss Lovell? Has she been pressed too? I declare if she is not with all these men handing pails of water! Georgie, Miss Lovell, will you come here!"

But Miss Lovell, who was a volunteer, was too much charmed with her present occupation to relinquish it at Lady John's command. Keeping at a safe distance from the Captain, she had joined a knot of stout peasant women and young men, and was one of the links in the chain, as it is called. The work was going on bravely now. The second engine had come

up and been welcomed with a shout of triumph. It was at once set in motion, and pails of water destined to feed it flew from hand to hand, whilst the black serpent-like hose roared and hissed against the flames.

"Very fine! very grand indeed!" said Professor Smith. "And I think, Lady John——"

"Lady John is gone for Miss Lovell," said Mr. Enfield. "Perhaps she can't find her. She seems to have vanished somewhere. I think I had better go and look for her—eh, Professor Smith?"

Off he flew, whilst Mrs. Barton joined the Professor.

"Fortitude, like Madame de l'Epine's, *I* never witnessed," she exclaimed; "it is heroic, Professor Smith—it is grand! I enjoyed it a great deal more than the fire, I assure you. I dote on character. That is why I don't care for sensational works, in which character is sacrificed to incident, you know."

Now, however much the Professor might agree with Mrs. Barton in the abstract, incident, as shown in the fire, was a good deal more interesting to him just then, though undeniably sensational, than Madame de l'Epine's fortitude. Nay, he was even provoked with Mrs. Barton, who consistently turned her back on the fire, but very perversely hindered his view.

"That woman is a bore," he thought, "moving on one side, whilst Mrs. Barton, happily unconscious of his secret thoughts, went on with unabated fluency, convinced that she was charming her hearer."

In the meanwhile, Lady John had not been idle. She had rescued Miss Lovell, and borne her away, and persuaded Madame de l'Epine into accepting her hospitable offer.

"Then do come at once," said Lady John. "Georgie is wet through, and it is getting very chill," she added with a little shiver.

"Pray do not wait for me," said Madame de l'Epine quietly. "I am too weak to be of any help here, but I cannot leave this spot whilst these brave men are risking life and limb to save my property."

"But you can be of no use, you know," said Lady John, who was already tired of the fire. "I must go in on account of Miss Lovell; the Professor, too, has made a mess of himself. But I shall come back for you directly."

Madame de l'Epine raised a protest, but her friend was already gone. Keeping a firm hold of Miss Georgie Lovell, who cast as many reluctant looks behind as any Eurydice, Lady John tripped away, taking up Professor Smith on the road. Mr. Enfield, having found a new field for his energies, had rushed on, first to order "warm baths for everyone;" and Mrs. Barton, having enough, no doubt, of Madame de l'Epine's fortitude, had turned her powers of admiration in another direction.

All this time Silvia had not uttered one word. She had had her exclamations of dismay and wonder when the fire first broke out; but once the evil was found to be almost hopeless, she had stood and looked on, and the light of the flames, which shone across her silent face, showed it in that settled gravity which seems as natural to the Italian countenance as its smiles. The presence of Lady John and her friends left her unmoved, and did not rouse her from her mute contemplation. She watched the flames, the lurid sky, the clouds of fierce smoke, the flickering

light which shone for miles around, and still she spoke not. The burning down of that house which had given her friendly shelter for so many weeks, had sobered her utterly. It seemed as if these devouring flames were consuming with them a portion of her life; as if happy days, bright mornings, delightful evenings had perished with these walls, which had divided them from the outer world.

"They may rebuild the house," she thought, "but it will never again be to me what it has been."

A sudden exclamation of Madame de l'Epine roused her from her meditative mood. She turned round and saw her embracing Mr. Meredith.

"Oh! Charles, Charles!" she cried in mingled joy and sorrow, "how glad I am to see you, but what a welcome for your return!"

Mr. Meredith kissed his sister, and greeted Silvia courteously.

"I thought the disaster greater than it is," he said, looking calmly at the flames. "I trust neither you nor Mademoiselle Nardi felt too much frightened."

"No; luckily the fire began early."

"Its fury will soon be over," remarked Mr. Meredith after a while. "I am glad to find you so composed, Joséphine."

He left them as he spoke, and went up to the Maire and the Curé, who had discreetly kept aloof. Then the three joined the captain of the firemen. The scene was no longer now what it had been. The blackened walls of the château were beginning to appear from behind the sheet of flame. The sky was darkening, and the declining moon lit the smoking ruins, on which water still continued to pour. But the

“chain” had thinned; many zealous labourers had gone to their homes, wearied with their labour. Some of the firemen stood in a group, resting and partaking of the refreshments which Madame de l’Epine had ordered for them—the rest worked on; but as the strength and rage of the fire had lessened, so the eagerness to conquer and stifle it had diminished notably.

Before he took any active part in what was doing, or yet remained to be done, Mr. Meredith probably wished to make a few inquiries; for he was deep in conversation with the captain of the firemen, when Silvia’s voice said behind him:

“Mr. Meredith!”

He looked round quickly, and, as it seemed to Silvia even then, with a flash of gladness in his eyes.

She came with a message—his sister wanted him, and was too tired to rise.

“Come at once—with me—” added Silvia in English, “I must speak to you.”

And he went at once, as she asked.

Mr. Meredith could not know how great a change there was in Silvia since his return, but the change was there. The grave composure with which she had looked on at the catastrophe was gone. Her cheeks were flushed, her looks were troubled, her lips quivered.

“Was it an accident?” she whispered.

“You mean the fire? There is no doubt about it.”

“You do not think that—that—man had any hand in it?”

Mr. Meredith looked at her in grave surprise.

“Did not my stepfather tell you?” he asked.

“Then it is true,” replied Silvia, with a sigh of relief; “thank God!”

Mr. Meredith did not seem to mind her. The fears she betrayed for his safety, the relief she could not hide when she learned that the danger she dreaded was over for ever, seemed to pass alike unheeded by him. He looked strangely absent, considering how great a catastrophe marked his return, and only saying, "There is no doubt the fire was accidental," he joined his sister.

"Lady John has kindly offered to receive us," began Madame de l'Epine, "but——"

"Surely you do not hesitate about accepting," he interrupted, with some eagerness.

Madame de l'Epine looked at Silvia with evident doubt and hesitation, and Silvia understood the appeal, for she blushed and smiled.

"Where you go I go," she said, with her childish solemnity of manner, "and what you like best so do I like it also."

"Then I think we had better go now, ma'am," unceremoniously said Mrs. Groom.

"Yes, let us go," replied her mistress, rising and taking her arm.

Silvia changed colour and stood still with surprise, for she saw Mr. Meredith turning away. He was not accompanying them. Natural as it was that he should stay behind, she could not help, when Madame de l'Epine had gone on a few steps, turning back to him, saying:

"Do you not come?"

He did not look surprised at so unreasonable a question. He only said in that absent way which had already seemed so strange to her,

"No, not yet, at least. Good evening, Mademoi-

selle Nardi. You look pale, pray try and have some rest."

His voice was kind again, his look was friendly once more, and lingered a moment upon her. Then he was gone, and Silvia, hurt and disconcerted, went on to join her friend.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN, after being duly received by Lady John, Silvia and Madame de l'Epine retired to rest, Mademoiselle Nardi found that her old room had been assigned to her once more. She could not help saying, as she glanced towards the bronze sphinx:

"I did not think that lady should ever see me here again."

Madame de l'Epine, who had entered the room with her to see that she was comfortable, replied quickly:

"I trust she shall not see you here long, Silvia *mia*. I hope we shall soon be all once more in Saint Rémy. Charles has arrived, and I trust my dear father will soon come back."

"She does not speak of her husband," thought Silvia.

Sympathy is not always best spoken, at least not always best expressed in speech. There are perfumes too subtle to be poured out, and this is one. Silvia, forgetting for a while her own trouble, twined her arms around the neck of her friend. She laid her fresh young cheek to Joséphine's, already faded before its time, and began telling her little funny stories about

the firemen and Miss Lovell, and Lady John, which she had seen spite her gravity, and thus succeeded in making her smile.

"Why, how did you see all this?" asked Joséphine, wondering.

"When I set forth in my travels," replied Silvia, "I applied to a fairy for a gift, and she answered me thus: 'Use thine eyes—use thine eyes.' And so I do use mine eyes."

Madame de l'Epine looked at her wistfully.

"I wish some fairy would give me a spell to keep you, Silvia. I always fear you will slip out of my hands some day."

"Madame," said Mrs. Groom, putting in her head at the door, "you were very tired, and there you are standing on your poor legs all this time."

"Very true," sighed her mistress. "Good night, Silvia *mia*. God bless you!"

"Mrs. Groom did well to come in," thought Silvia, as the door closed upon them. "I know what Joséphine means; but where is the use of it all? Don't I see that he does not care about me now?"

She opened her window, and looked out. She could only see the sky, a few late stars, and the summits of tall, ghost-like trees, as calm and still as if they, too, shared the universal rest. What does Nature care for man's troubles? Some such resentful thought came to Silvia as, after a while, she closed the window again, and tried to sleep. In vain! Madame de l'Epine's words had stirred the very depths of her heart. She felt disturbed, restless, and unhappy, and tossed to and fro through the long weary night. At length, as dawn came, she fell into a troubled sleep.

It was day when she woke, and saw Mrs. Groom standing at the foot of the bed looking at her very attentively. Silvia's first recollection was of the fire.

"Is it out?" she cried.

"Quite out. But what has ailed you all this blessed night, mamzelle? Madame de l'Epine came in three times, and you were moaning and crying, and you have been talking ever since I came and sat here."

"Did I not hear Mr. Meredith's voice?" asked Silvia, very suddenly. "Surely I heard him talking to Joséphine at the door a while ago!"

"Did you?" hesitatingly replied Mrs. Groom.

"I did!" cried Silvia, with a sudden suspicion of something, though of what she could not tell. "I heard him as plainly as I hear you. What is it, Mrs. Groom?"

"What is what, mamzelle?"

"What has happened?"—what brought him?"

"I am no hand at story-telling," replied Mrs. Groom, after a moment's pause. "Mr. Meredith came to take his sister away."

"Where to?" asked Silvia, impetuously, and getting up to dress—"where are they gone?—why did they leave me behind?—where are they gone?" she asked again, hurrying on her clothes.

"To Paris, where the poor Captain has had a fit," answered Mrs. Groom, rather sternly.

Silvia remained mute with amazement and grief on hearing the dreary news. Mrs. Groom continued—

"Who gave him the fit? Never mind. It is no business of mine; but a fit he has."

"And why did they not take me?" asked Silvia, with tears in her eyes. "Why am I left behind?"

"Why am I left behind?" retorted Mrs. Groom. "Perhaps, mamzelle, if you think over it, you will find it out. I suspect some one has been behaving very badly, and breaking the poor Captain's heart—I suspect that, having a fit, he talks too much, and maybe says that which his poor daughter had rather no one—not even you, mamzelle—should hear."

"But why am I left here in this house?" cried Silvia, crimson with indignation. "I will not stay here. I know it was a plot of Mr. Meredith's to bring us here. He knew it all last night."

"Of course he did," replied Mrs. Groom, "and so did I; and I told him it would just kill my dear young lady not to have two or three hours rest. Glad enough he was to have you both safe here, getting a little sleep. And, of course, it was a great comfort to leave you here with Lady John to take care of you."

"Mr. Meredith is too considerate," cried Silvia, much exasperated, "but I will not stay here."

"They are all alike," philosophically remarked Mrs. Groom. "They will have their own way, whatever your own grief or trouble may be."

"I shall go and stay at the farm," continued Silvia, wholly unmoved.

"Madame de l'Epine bade me give you this," said Mrs. Groom, handing her a note, which she had kept as a last resource.

Silvia took it and read:—

"Silvia *mia*, my heart is broken. Do not be angry if I leave you behind. I shall bring my father back in a day or two, at the latest; and my lot is so hard—so very hard! Pray for your own Joséphine."

"I am not angry," said Silvia, much mollified; "but I shall go and stay at the farm."

Mrs. Groom fairly lost patience.

"Mr. Meredith is expected back at the farm this evening or to-morrow," she said drily; "if you wish to go after that, mamzelle, why, you may, that is all I have to say."

Thus defeated, Silvia was silent; but only pride prevented her tears from falling.

"Shall I help you to dress?" asked Mrs. Groom, who chose to be blind.

"No, thank you. It is early yet. I shall try to sleep again."

She walked back to the bed, threw herself upon it, nearly dressed as she was, and turned her face to the wall; whilst Mrs. Groom lightly stepped across the floor and closed the door softly.

"It was he who made his sister leave me behind," thought Silvia, with a swelling heart; "I know it. I heard him saying 'Let her sleep.' I thought I was dreaming, but now I know I was not. It was his doing. Why should I not have gone with them and seen the poor Captain? Do I not love him, and does he not like me? Why was I left behind, whilst I was asleep, like a child whom one must not waken to trouble?"

She cried at the thought. The sense of loneliness and desertion was very strong upon her, and the conviction that all this was Mr. Meredith's doing, made it still harder to bear. Silvia was somewhat jealous and exacting. Worldly wisdom, prudence, she held as naught when feeling was at stake. Since Mr. Meredith could urge his sister to leave her behind, why, he did

not care for her, he had never cared for her, and all was over between them for ever. Less than for ever would not have satisfied Silvia in her present mood. At length she roused herself. She was proud, and pride can do good service sometimes. So she checked her tears, stifled her sobs, rose and dressed herself, resolved to bear this trial and to defy it.

"I know you are up. May I come in?" said a voice outside the door, whilst a hand tried the lock.

Almost before Silvia could say "Yes," for she had recognized Mrs. Barton's voice, the door opened, and Mrs. Barton entered the room.

"What a brave young creature you must be," she said, admiringly, "to be up and dressed after such a night. And then the poor Captain, to crown all. Poor Madame de l'Epine was so loath to go without you. But dear Lady John said she would take such care of you. Lady John is very anxious to make her peace with you, Mademoiselle Nardi."

Silvia knit her smooth eyebrows in a way that boded no good to Lady John's hopes of renewed amity.

"I never forget, Mrs. Barton," she said, with childish solemnity; "neither good nor evil; but I am Lady John's guest——"

Here Lady John herself, asking for admittance through her maid, interrupted the conversation. Lady John, who came in in the most charming morning dress of pink and white stripes, looking extremely pretty, was herself the very best argument in her own cause. Lady John was both condoling and gracious. She was so sorry for the dear Captain; but then what a comfort to think that the fire was out, that the left wing of the

château was quite safe, and that the whole building was not so much injured as had been thought. "I even understand that the Captain can be brought home very soon," continued Lady John. "What can have given him that fit? Do you know, Mademoiselle Nardi?" she added, turning upon her with sudden and undisguised curiosity.

"I know nothing, Lady John," replied Silvia, with some bitterness. "Madame de l'Epine went away whilst I was asleep."

"And then there's Professor Smith laid up with such a cold," resumed Lady John, ignoring Silvia's answer; "and Miss Lovell too. Of course it was no more than I expected, after the extraordinary manner in which they both behaved."

"Now, Lady John," said Mrs. Barton, "I have got such good news for you. I heard the dear Professor telling Parker he felt equal to coming down."

"He must not!—he shall not!" cried Lady John, hastily. "Mademoiselle Nardi, excuse me, I really must see to that."

"Such a heart," said Mrs. Barton, watching the retreating motion of Lady John's pink and white skirt. "Lady John is all heart, Mademoiselle Nardi."

Silvia did not answer. She knew that Mrs. Barton was going to bore her, but she had not heart or spirit to defend herself. So when Mrs. Barton indulged in the praises of the whole household, from Lady John down to Parker, she listened with a pathetic resignation, till suddenly the good lady launched into a new theme. Ada Gray was coming, and Mrs. Barton burned incense beforehand at her shrine.

"Such a sweet creature!" she said, dreamily. "Such dove-like eyes, as Mr. Meredith used to say."

"Indeed!" echoed Silvia, whose dark eyes flashed like those of a young hawk; then, scorning to be jealous, she added more graciously: "Miss Gray is very lovely and very amiable."

"Amiable! She is heavenly, my dear! but I wish she would make up her mind. It is not fair to keep two such men dangling so!"

"What men?" asked Silvia, sharply.

"Why, Mr. Meredith and Mr. Lovell, who have both been after her so long."

Silvia heard her like one transfixed. Could that be? Was it possible? Was that the key to every mystery? She longed to know more, to question Mrs. Barton, but again pride stepped in and bade her be silent. Perhaps she hoped that Mrs. Barton would speak without being questioned; but if so, she was disappointed. Mrs. Barton was fond of tangents, and a love affair of her own youth acting as tangent, now took her so far away from Mr. Meredith and Ada Gray, that Silvia got very weary, till Mrs. Barton luckily discovered she was not dressed, and went back to her own room.

"But if he cared for Ada Gray, why did he care for me?" asked Silvia of her own thoughts; and the reply was so far soothing, that when Mrs. Groom came in, bringing her a cup of tea, Silvia was herself again, and could thank Mrs. Groom with one of her bright smiles.

"Did you not say Mr. Meredith was to come back to-night, Mrs. Groom?" she said. "I am longing to have news of the dear Captain."

"So am I, and no doubt some one ought to be here to see about that poor château that is left all to itself, after being burned; but for all that, mamzelle, I do hope that neither Mr. Meredith, nor his sister, nor the Captain, may come for many a day yet."

"Why so, Mrs. Groom?" asked Silvia, much amazed.

"Why, because Miss Meredith has just arrived; and where Miss Meredith is mischief is sure to be."

"Is Miss Meredith here in this very house?" asked Silvia, with sudden interest.

"Indeed, then, she is. Miss Meredith, who cannot endure my dear young mistress, had the impudence to invite herself to her house with her maid, and that poor Mrs. Green. And on finding the château burned—serve her right!—why, she drives straight here, as a matter of course. When people have money the world is their own, and every house an inn, I suppose. But how Lady John will like that, she having Miss Gray and Mr. Lovell as well, I don't know."

"Are they here too, Mrs. Groom?"

"Oh! yes, they are. Mr. Lovell came early this morning, I believe, and Miss Meredith brought Miss Gray. It never rains but it pours. You will have plenty of company."

"I am very curious to see Miss Meredith, Mrs. Groom."

"Are you, mamzelle? Well, you'll see nothing very charming, in my opinion. No living soul could reckon up her whims and fancies. But that is nothing to her temper. Only two people can agree with her. Mr. Charles, because he is her master; and Miss Gray, because she is her slave. With these two she gets on,

and quarrels with the rest of the world to make up for it. I suppose that is why she is resolved they shall marry."

"And is she so resolved?" asked Silvia, coolly.

"So people say," more guardedly resumed Mrs. Groom.

"Then why don't they marry?" exclaimed Silvia, with a toss of her bright young head.

"Perhaps they will," replied Mrs. Groom, coolly, at the same time giving her a scrutinizing look, of which Silvia remained unconscious. She stood in the middle of the floor fastening her girdle with a hand that shook, spite all she could do. But she rallied, if not effectually, at least very quickly.

"What a lovely morning!" she said, running to the window, and throwing it open with feverish haste. "Just hear the birds, Mrs. Groom. I think I shall go down and listen to them."

And humming a tune quite gaily, Mademoiselle Nardi skipped downstairs, taking two steps at a time.

"Yes, yes, sing away," said Mrs. Groom, shaking her head ominously. "I told you about the moth and the candle, you know I did, in this very room. And if you began by being the candle, I am very much afraid you are the moth now, you poor silly thing!"

Whatever might be the truth of Mrs. Groom's conjecture, Silvia's spirits rallied considerably as she got down into the cool and lovely garden. With that blue sky and fresh breeze, and delightful green around her, and those joyous birds singing on every bough, Silvia felt sure of Mr. Meredith. She was too true a woman for her mood not to change with every passing im-

pression, and as her temper was a happy one, quick to feel the joy and beauty of surrounding things, her views of life were rarely dark or desponding.

"He likes me, I am sure of it; sure as that I hear that little linnet singing," thought Silvia, as she walked along the lime-tree avenue, amusing herself by trying to step on the waving shadows which flitted from under her little feet. "Yes, he likes me, and yet—yet he does not know that I care about him."

As Silvia came to this conclusion, so soothing to her childish pride, she heard a sound of voices which made her look up and stand still, for there, by the fountain before her, she saw a lady, Miss Meredith, no doubt, sitting on a garden chair in the sun, and sitting by her the fair and calm Lady Gray. A wicked fairy and her captive the Princess might have looked so, thought Silvia.

They did not see her, as she thought, and she scanned them both; but Miss Meredith especially, with close attention.

If that lady had been good-looking in her youth, few vestiges of the fact remained to grace her latter years. Two black and fiery eyes burned in her pale face of a dull yellow gray. Her chin and her nose nearly met, her body was bent, and she looked not merely ill-tempered, but dangerous.

"When you have done looking you'll tell us," she abruptly remarked, evidently addressing Silvia.

Mademoiselle Nardi coloured, but she laughed at being caught, and on seeing her bright face Miss Meredith relaxed considerably.

"She is the Italian girl," she said, turning to Miss Gray, and speaking with the privileged insolence of a

rich woman, who had been a despot from her youth upwards.

"Roman, not Italian," corrected Silvia, as she drew near.

"Pray what is the difference?" asked Miss Meredith.

"Rome conquered Italy," was the prompt reply.

"*Roma, Roma, non e piu com era prima,*" retorted Miss Meredith.

"There are more things than Rome that are not as they were once," replied Silvia, reddening.

Nothing was farther from her thoughts than a personal reflection on Miss Meredith; but in that light this lady evidently took her remark. She stared at Miss Gray, then at Silvia, then at Miss Gray again, then leaning back in her chair, she uttered a "Well! I never!" that was both emphatic and significant.

Silvia guessed what was passing in her mind, and feeling that she had laid herself open to suspicion, she blushed deeply, and for once looked much confused.

"Come, you have some grace left in you," remarked Miss Meredith, with a sort of grim good-humour, "and blushing does become you, though I daresay you don't blush often. Ada, fetch me my fan, will you?"

Miss Gray rose obediently, and at once Miss Meredith signed Silvia to take her vacant place. Mademoiselle Nardi obeyed with a doubtful and contrite look, and the old lady taking her hand, said very kindly:

"Don't be afraid of me, my dear. People say I have a bad temper, and perhaps I have, perhaps I have; but if so I keep it for those whom I dislike, and I like you much, very much," she added, emphatically; "I am so fond of the Italians," she continued, with

that sort of intonation which the French call caressing. "I used to go every winter to Rome formerly. I knew old Prince Nardi very well, and I saw you when you were quite a little girl. Don't you remember?"

"Not at all," honestly replied Silvia, wondering at her forgetfulness, which was not so surprising as she thought it.

"I remember you, though. You were such a mischievous little monkey, but very captivating, and you have not lost the gift. No, my dear, you have not lost it. Dear Italy, it broke my heart to leave it, and come back to England! A low, foggy, damp country. I hate it, my dear! What is there like a Roman palace? I wonder you like this place; it is as bad as England, I think. So poor Prince Nardi, who used to kiss my hand so gallantly, is dead! And who has got the palace. Ah! I remember; I suppose you have no friends, poor little thing! But Joséphine is a good soul. She will be sure to take care of you."

Silvia, who had listened to this rapid flow of speech with amazement, now put in a few words.

"I have friends in Italy," she said, very gravely.

"Oh! then, you will be sure to have *mal du pays*, or something of the kind; and you will go back to them. Don't leave poor Joséphine too suddenly and too soon; Charles has told me how fond she is of you."

Here Miss Meredith fixed her black eyes full and steadily on Silvia, who coloured slightly; and seeing Miss Gray returning, rose to surrender the chair she had taken in compliance with Miss Meredith's wishes.

"Don't," pettishly said the old lady, forcibly de-

taining her; "she'll get another. Besides, I can't bear her! She is to marry Charles, you know, and to sit in my chair, and to sleep in my bed, and to wear my diamonds; and though it's the thing I wish for, and no fault of her own, I can't bear her. So don't wonder if I am cross to her, and kind to you, who will never step into my shoes, and who have got that bright Italian face I like so well."

And as she spoke she looked very kindly into that bright face, which turned rather pale beneath the gaze. Indeed, Silvia no longer attempted to resist Miss Meredith, or to rise, as politeness demanded. She felt stunned. So it was certain. Why not? Mr. Meredith had taken her rejection for granted, and complied with his cousin's desires. Why not again? She had had her chance and thrown it away, and it would never return—never. Nay, she must not wish for it, either in honesty or in honour; but this last thought came vaguely and dimly, and was soon effaced in the bitterness of her disappointment. She looked up at Miss Gray, and felt that she detested her. She sided with the Captain, who had once said he disliked pale girls; and she thought him the most clear-sighted and judicious of men. Of course pale people with low voices were all cheats—of course they were. Mrs. Groom, too, she remembered, disliked Ada Gray. If the whole world had just then been conjured against that unfortunate young lady, Silvia would have joined in its ban against her rival.

"How beautifully that linnet is singing," said Miss Gray, who, unconscious of Silvia's changed feelings, stood listening to the melodious voice of the little songster.

"I hate birds!" vehemently said Silvia.

"Do you?" replied Miss Gray, with placid wonder.

"Perhaps you dislike singing," suggested Miss Meredith, scanning Silvia's flushed face with evident amusement.

"Oh! no, I like it very much."

"Well, then, Ada shall sing for you this evening. No one sings ballads like Ada. You will give us Charlie's favourite, "Auld Robin Gray," will you not, dear? Mademoiselle Nardi will like that."

Miss Gray politely expressed her willingness to do anything to please Mademoiselle Nardi; and whilst she was still talking, Miss Meredith rose, took her arm, and walked away, leaving Silvia sitting on the garden-chair. She sat there as if the evil fairy had thrown some spell upon her. The sound of a step soon roused her, and looking up, Silvia saw Mr. Lovell. It was not many days since they had parted, and it now seemed to her very long ago. If Mr. Lovell had come from a remote country, Silvia could not have felt more strange and distant than she did as she looked at Monsieur de l'Epine's disciple in the matter of mineral oil. But as he greeted her with his usual courtesy, a sudden recollection flashed across her mind.

"And the Captain!" she cried. "You were in Paris with him, Mr. Lovell. What of him? Will he soon be well again?"

A constrained expression passed across Mr. Lovell's face; but it only passed, leaving it heavily calm, as before.

"Awkward age, you know," he said. "So the château was burned down. Hope you were not frightened."

"Is Monsieur de l'Epine with the Captain?" pursued Silvia, without heeding him. Perhaps she thought to hear something about Mr. Meredith. If so, she was disappointed.

"No, Monsieur de l'Epine is not with him," replied Mr. Lovell, rather coldly. "I left Paris two days ago. The fact is, it bored me, so I came back here."

If Silvia had not been wrapped up in her own thoughts, she must have been struck with the look that accompanied this reply, and the tone in which it was uttered. But Silvia was young, and the signs of life were still hieroglyphics to her. She did not ask herself why Mr. Lovell had come back so suddenly, why the Captain had had a fit, how Mr. Meredith had known of it and come for his sister, and why Monsieur de l'Epine seemed so suddenly to have vanished. The history of her little heart was the world's history for her just then—revolutions, earthquakes, the downfall of empires, would have been nothing to the bitterness she had gone through for the last twenty-four hours, and the cruel jealousy suddenly awakened by Ada Gray. Disappointment was the only feeling Mr. Lovell's answer suggested. Mr. Lovell was more experienced—her blank face told him something, though he was by no means sure of its meaning; and he stayed there looking at her, instead of going on for his morning's practice.

Though boredom was the habitual state in which Mr. Lovell existed, he now and then made some struggling attempts to escape from the bonds of his tyrant. Those efforts were predestined to failure, and no one knew it better than Mr. Lovell himself; but a languid obstinacy, which was one of the traits of his

nature, made him persevere till he was fairly beaten by his subtle enemy, when he gave in sullenly but entirely, and for a while relapsed into his old listlessness.

Mr. Lovell's ambition for some time had been to prevail over *ennui* by becoming a dead shot. A fair shot he had been since he was sixteen, but a dead shot he was not. As soon as the brilliant idea occurred to him, he began practising; and being, luckily, not gifted with a correct eye, he was, as he said himself, "booked for a few weeks at least."

Lady John, who was most anxious to be gracious to her guest, allowed him to have a target at the further end of the grounds; and thither, being one of those sort of men who do not require the society of their fellows on such occasions, Mr. Lovell was now repairing alone, when, as we said, he came upon Silvia, spoke to her, and, instead of going on, remained by her side.

"Pleasant here," he said, endeavouring to draw her into discourse, spite her gloomy and abstracted looks.

"I do not find it pleasant at all," tartly answered Silvia; "it is bitterly cold," she added with a shiver.

"Nice that little bird is singing," persisted Mr. Lovell, evidently wishing to linger.

Silvia looked up at the tree, and stopping her ears with her fingers, said angrily:

"Will you hold your tongue, you stupid little thing!"

Mr. Lovell stared, looked up at the tree, saw nothing, then did one of the rarest things he ever did, for Mr. Lovell actually laughed.

Silvia, charmed at heart to find some one with

whom she could be offended, took her fingers out of her ears, gave Mr. Lovell a haughty look, then rose and walked away with a great assumption of dignity. Mr. Lovell looked after her and shook his head, then proceeded slowly and musingly to his target. It stood at the end of a lonely path, with a high wall on one side, and a row of trees on the other. Scarcely a ray of sun could pierce the gloom of this place, and the very target, though newly set there, had already acquired a damp, mouldy look. But Lady John had convinced Mr. Lovell that gloom was the very thing for acquiring a correct eye, and as he had no preference for cheerful or lovely spots, this did very well for him. But the bull's-eye seemed invisible this morning, so wide the mark were all Mr. Lovell's shots.

Mr. Lovell was thinking, for he was equal to the exertion when he chose, and for once he was thinking seriously of marriage. Madame de Montesson won the heart of a Duke of Orleans by calling him "Gros Papa" in a frolic; and by scolding a bird in a tree Silvia finished Mr. Lovell's conquest. He discovered what he had suspected before, that she was the very wife he wanted. He chuckled to himself as he went over the morning's incident.

"She called the bird a stupid thing, she did!" he mentally ejaculated; and again came the inevitable conclusion that a girl equal to that would prove a delightful companion, and shed that variety over daily life which Mr. Lovell had, up to the present time, been unable to extract from anyone or anything.

CHAPTER IX.

"Now, my dear, Ada is going to sing Charlie's favourite song for you," said Miss Meredith, bending forward to speak in Silvia's ear.

The young girl started, as if Miss Meredith's breath on her cheek were more than she could bear. The whole day long she had been Miss Meredith's prey. The whole day long Miss Meredith had clung to her, and talked of Italy, and, by way of conclusion, of Charles Meredith; and now and then of Ada Gray, but rather as a matter of course than as from a set purpose. The infliction had seemed insupportable to Silvia; she had found it in the garden, at breakfast, at dinner, and now it followed her to Lady John's drawing-room in the evening.

It is a very unequal battle, and often, too, a very cruel one, that of the young against the old, of inexperience against worldly knowledge, of a set purpose against the will that may be strong, but knows not what to guard. Miss Meredith had heard of Silvia Nardi, and she had taken a long journey for the express purpose of seeing, studying, and, if need were, crushing this intruder. Ada Gray had mentioned her so slightly that Miss Meredith had taken it into her head Silvia was a little girl.

"What is the little Italian girl at Saint Rémy like?" she had said carelessly to Mrs. Green, who was too thankful at thus escaping the danger of a scolding, to enlighten the jealous and suspicious lady. All might have gone on well but for Mrs. Barton.

Letter-writing was the delight of Mrs. Barton's heart. She had written letters home in which Silvia was mentioned, and one of these was unluckily addressed to a friend of Miss Meredith's. In that letter occurred the following passage: "Mademoiselle Nardi is simply one of the most fascinating girls *I* ever saw. She has eyes and a smile which would turn even wise heads in London, but which are almost wasted in this desert, &c., &c."

"Take care of your handsome cousin," said the kind friend to Miss Meredith; "there is a dangerous belle in Saint Rémy." And she read the passage.

"In Saint Rémy!" screamed Miss Meredith. "Why, she is in the house with him. Oh! what a cheat that old Green is!"

But instead of scolding Mrs. Green for her duplicity, which might have frightened her away, Miss Meredith lured the unwary lady with the expectation of a trip to Switzerland; and once she had got her as far as Paris, altered her plans, and said she would go down and escort Ada Gray to Saint Rémy. Mrs. Green was quite aware of her peril, but it was too late to escape, so she submitted, and prepared to put the best face she could on the matter. "I shall say she is grown," she thought rather desperately. "Girls do shoot up wonderfully, as everyone knows." But there was no need for that excuse. Miss Meredith saw Silvia, and made no comment.

"That is a very bad sign," thought poor Mrs. Green.

It was a bad sign—a bad sign for her, for Charles Meredith, for Silvia, for everyone. Miss Meredith's rapid conclusion on seeing the young Italian had been:

"There is, or has been, some love-affair between her and Charles Meredith, and that is why he has never mentioned her in his letters." For it was one of Miss Meredith's fictions—her quiver was full of them—to give Silvia to understand that she had ever been mentioned by Mr. Meredith to his cousin. In reality, they had not met once since Silvia had come to Saint Rémy.

Miss Meredith felt very angry with her young relation. But he was far away. It was useless to quarrel with him. It might not be useless, however, to worry Silvia, and it would at least be just retribution upon her for being pretty, and for interfering with Miss Meredith's plans. Against such a woman, old, unscrupulous, and wilful, Silvia's chances were but small. She was not so simple as not to see through Miss Meredith's motives, nor so credulous as to believe every word that lady uttered; but then she could not tell how far she spoke the truth or not, and the doubt made her wretched, and stung her to the quick. There was no pledge, no promise between her and Mr. Meredith—there was even no clear, though tacit understanding. Silvia had so contrived that she had given her heart away to one who, thanks to her waywardness, remained unshackled and free.

Without the shyness and unaccountable reticence of lovers, a love-tale need seldom be written. The modest grace which is the charm of that passion is often its crowning calamity. Hearts have been broken and lives wrecked because a word was not spoken in the right season.

"If I knew!—if I only knew!" thought Silvia, smarting under the sting of Miss Meredith's speech,

"how I would defy her!" But she did not know; that was cruel, and more cruel still, she was surrendered like a prey to her tormentor. She now looked around her to see if escape were not possible, but Lady John, Mrs. Barton, Mr. Enfield, and Mrs. Green, even, were all gathered in a group, Miss Gray and Mr. Lovell were engaged in close conversation, and unless she rose and left Miss Meredith point-blank, she could not avoid that lady. Miss Meredith's black eyes followed Silvia's look with evident amusement; then, either misunderstanding her, or pretending to do so, she said shrewdly, laying her hand on the young girl's arm as she spoke:

"No, no, my dear—not Mr. Lovell. Lady John is saving him up for some one, and would never forgive you."

Indignation and amazement kept Silvia mute. Mr. Lovell had been markedly attentive to her the whole of that day, and she had treated him with the capricious indifference of a privileged beauty. And now that odious Miss Meredith taxed her with wishing to allure him, and dared her to do so.

And why should she not receive Mr. Lovell's attentions, if it pleased her to accept them. She would; and not only would she receive them, but she would encourage them, just to vex Miss Meredith and Lady John, both of them. So when Miss Meredith, raising her shrill voice, said aloud: "Ada, my dear, you know you promised Mademoiselle Nardi Charlie's song!" and Miss Gray obediently opened the piano, Silvia, taking this as a defiance, looked at Mr. Lovell, who, with a vivacity very unusual in him, rose at once, and instead of turning Miss Gray's music, came and sat by Made-

moiselle Nardi's side. The little triumph, such as it was, restored Silvia to her natural good-humour, and leaning back in her chair, she looked complacently at Lady John's drawing-room. The light from the wax candles flashed back from the mirrors; the pictures looked mysterious and alluring. The crimson tints of the furniture, the gilding of the white panels, the flower-stands, the brackets and cabinets laden with curiosities, rare china and statuettes, all blended in one harmonious picture, which charmed Silvia's eye. This was not, indeed, the grand and grave old splendour of Nardi Palace, but then it was so different from the half-bare aspect of the château.

"What a beautiful room!" she said to Mr. Lovell, whilst Ada Gray's fingers ran over the keys of the piano.

"Yes, not amiss," he languidly replied; and Silvia remembered that Mr. Lovell was rich, and must care very little for all this.

Everyone has heard "Auld Robin Gray," every heart has been moved by the plaintive and pathetic ballad. Miss Gray had not a very fine voice, but she sang with taste and feeling. Silvia's colour changed as she heard her. This was Mr. Meredith's favourite ballad, and it seemed to be Mr. Lovell's too. How attentively he listened for one so listless! how he bent his head approvingly as Ada's voice glided sweetly through the melody! how emphatically he murmured, "beautiful! beautiful!" Silvia could not bear to look at him, she could not bear to listen to her. He was not Mr. Lovell then, he was Mr. Meredith admiring Ada Gray, and she felt stifled with mingled grief and envy. One by one she pulled to pieces the flowers on

her lap, and her expressive face told so plainly the story within her, that Mr. Lovell read its meaning; and as Miss Gray rose from the instrument, midst an approving murmur, he said,

"I am sure Mademoiselle Nardi sings."

"Of course I do," impetuously replied Silvia. "Don't all Italians sing?" she added, more gently.

Mr. Lovell began a courteous request that she would favour them, but without waiting to hear the end of his prayer, Silvia rose, walked quickly to the piano, as if she feared Miss Gray would take possession of it once more; then, when she was seated, and felt secure on that head, she turned back, and, with her usual winning smile, asked of Mr. Lovell, who had followed her:

"What shall I sing? Oh! you need not look in the music," she added, with a little frown. "I never use music."

"Is *that* Mademoiselle Nardi going to sing?" asked Lady John, raising her eyeglass to look at the audacious usurper of Ada Gray's privileges.

"Yes, do you object?" quickly asked Silvia, looking at her, and answering an inquiry which had not been meant for her ear.

"Oh! dear no," replied Lady John, drily. "We shall be delighted to hear you!" And as a proof of the pleasure Silvia's singing was going to afford her, she began talking rather loud to Professor Smith.

But a spirit of anger, of defiance, and, alas! of jealous sorrow, was roused within Silvia Nardi. She was bent on crushing and eclipsing Ada Gray, on defying Miss Meredith, on charming Mr. Lovell, and snatching at least that fleeting victory from her defeat, and it was not Lady John's impertinence that could

check her in her course. Imitating the great Handel, she silenced her enemy as he woke his, by a stormy prelude; then, subsiding into a low, plaintive andante, so sweet that even Lady John felt surprised into listening, she sang a grand Ave Maria by one of the old Italian masters.

Passion is strong, and with the whole might of her passionate young heart, Silvia now wished to prevail over her rival.

Mr. Meredith was not there to hear her; but she forgot it, or only remembered that he had heard and praised Ada Gray. With a vehement earnestness strangely out of place in that cool, common-place, well-bred worldly circle, she poured forth soul, heart, and feeling in the notes that fell from her lips clear as silver, and sweet as the song of a wild bird. The effort was wonderful, and Silvia felt it herself. She forgot her aim, her triumph, and even her jealousy and her suffering in the delight with which she listened to her own voice as it rose and fell in the hushed room, like a pathetic pleading from earth to heaven.

When she ceased at length, and, rising, looked around her, Silvia did not doubt the meaning of the faces she saw. She had achieved a triumph; she knew it, and her eyes sparkled as she received her meed of praise and admiration. But without heeding Mr. Lovell, without heeding even Lady John, who had risen to congratulate her, she walked straight to Miss Meredith, and standing before her said with childish triumph:

“Well, do I sing well?”

“Divinely,” replied Miss Meredith, taking her hand and making her sit down by her side; “how is

it Charles never told me you had so wonderful a gift?"

Silvia's eyes flashed, and she fanned herself very fast.

"Mr. Meredith never heard me," she said, disdainfully; "I always practised when he was out."

"And why could you not sing for him?"

Silvia leaned back in her chair, and carelessly said she did not know—she did not like singing as a rule.

"Then it was for Mr. Lovell you sang to-night, my love?" said Miss Meredith, shrewdly.

Mr. Lovell stood within hearing; but Silvia was not going to be put down by Miss Meredith for that. "Yes," she said, composedly, "Mr. Lovell asked me, and so I sang."

Mr. Lovell looked puzzled, but he also looked flattered, and devoted himself to Silvia for the rest of the evening. He saw, or thought that he saw, which way Mademoiselle Nardi's caprices were tending. He was accustomed to be courted, and was habitually on his guard; but for once he found it pleasant to be met halfway. Moreover, Silvia's manner was not sufficiently clear for Mr. Lovell to feel quite secure, or to conceive that he had nothing to do. She had been cross in the morning without reason; without reason, too, she had been gracious in the evening; was it not probable, indeed most likely, that she should be cross again the next day? Then, on the principle that it is good to make one's hay whilst the sun shines, Mr. Lovell took care to reap as much as he could of his fair lady's favour.

In vain Lady John knit her brows, and looked pro-

voked—everyone else seemed to favour Mademoiselle Nardi's flirtation with the rich man. Miss Meredith coolly walked away and left them, and taking Ada's arm, kept her in an open window. Mrs. Green, indeed, seeing Lady John's darkening looks, did her best to lure her back, but in vain.

"My dear Miss Meredith," she said, in her most seductive voice, "I do so fear lest you should get another attack of bronchitis. Your delicate throat——"

"Mind your own throat, Green," tartly interrupted Miss Meredith, "and go and get me my shawl, will you?" she added.

Mrs. Green went obediently, brought back the shawl in an amazingly short space of time, and tenderly putting it on Miss Meredith's shoulders, again attempted to coax her back to the remote sofa on which Silvia and Mr. Lovell was sitting alone.

"You would be so much better there," she murmured, "and really, dear Miss Meredith, the evening air is so very chill."

"I tell you I'll not go near them," sharply replied Miss Meredith, darting a keen look over at Silvia's flushed face, and Mr. Lovell's rather animated features; "they are making fools of themselves, let them! Eh, Ada?"

Miss Gray, who stood leaning against the wall, with her hands clasped before her, and her eyes rather uneasily following every look and motion of the imprudent pair, tried to smile, but failed completely. Then Mrs. Green took a desperate resolve, and when Miss Meredith could not, as she conceived, see her, went and seated herself near Silvia.

The young girl frowned, Mr. Lovell stared, and both were silent.

"Won't you sing again, dear?" coaxingly asked Mrs. Green.

Before Silvia could reply, a sharp voice from the window called Mrs. Green away with an imperative "Green, what star is this?"

Thus summoned, Mrs. Green, who was profoundly ignorant of astronomy, did not dare to remain. Scarcely had she risen and walked away, when Mr. Lovell said hastily:

"Do not answer me now, pray do not."

Silvia felt no temptation to do so. Mr. Lovell had just made her an offer of marriage, and this had completely sobered her, and, indeed, frightened her too much for immediate speech. It is a sad thing to be rash and inexperienced in a world where prudence and the wisdom which springs from knowledge should guide our every step. Silvia was amazed to find how swiftly matters had progressed between her and Mr. Lovell, and yet, spite her amazement, she knew she had drawn this down on herself, and she was glad he did not press her for an immediate reply.

Mr. Lovell, indeed, was somewhat surprised at his own haste, though he did not repent it. Ever since his twentieth year he had been profoundly convinced that his first offer of marriage to a woman would also be his last, since it would inevitably be accepted; he had accordingly been very cautious in his dealings with the fair sex—so cautious, that Silvia was the first girl who had ever heard such a proposal from him. Prudence, indeed, was so far forgotten when it was uttered, that, though hopeful, Mr. Lovell did not feel

sure of a favourable reply, and therefore was he anxious to impress on Silvia that there was time, and that he was willing to wait. How he came to speak at all was a wonder to himself. Assuredly he was fascinated, but was he very deeply in love?

Men like Mr. Lovell, men who have honour and truth, but not very ardent feelings, are rarely enamoured according to the desperate Romeo fashion. They give all they have, but that thing is not in them; they know it, and they would not be different if they could; and when their feelings, such as they are, carry them away, they are more surprised than pleased. Mr. Lovell was too much smitten with this bright, dark-eyed Italian girl to regret having asked her to become his, but he was not so passionately in love as not to wonder at his own subjection. This, then, he supposed, was the great thing poets raved about, and men and women used to die of; and Mr. Lovell, with the common error of humanity, measured the great fiery sun of love by his own little rushlight, a light which, though little, was not to be despised; it burned feebly enough to be sure, but it gave all the flame it had to give, and it was true.

Very different and far more trying was Silvia's case. She did not love that good-natured, handsome, wealthy, and bored gentleman; and she knew it, and yet she had so behaved that he had a right to speak as he did. She could reject him, and intended doing so, but she could not utter that prompt, unequivocal "No," which she could certainly have spoken had her own conduct been different. To be honest and true as she was, is to be fettered by a hundred bonds, which the reckless

and the dishonest disregard: and if she was light and imprudent, Silvia Nardi was very sincere. She had not thought of Mr. Lovell's feelings in the least whilst she was indulging her vanity, her jealousy, her spirit of defiance this evening, but this oblivion was not the cool indifference of a flirt, and though she did not overestimate the strength or depth of Mr. Lovell's passion, she was startled to think he had such feelings, and still more startled to know she had done much to stimulate them into speech. Welcome, therefore, was silence, and welcome, too, Miss Meredith's return, when, saying sharply, "Shut the window, Green," that lady came back to her place on the sofa.

CHAPTER X.

THE bronze sphinx was keeping her patient watch over the dial that marked the progress of time in the brown bed-room of Lady John's house; and she was as grave and inscrutable about it as her grand sister in the Egyptian desert, who seems to be for ever brooding over dead Pharaohs within the shadow of the pyramids. The only vigil to be kept here, however, was over a dreaming girl, who sat by the open window thence looking down on Lady John's garden. She looked, but saw nothing—nothing, at least, that lay beneath her gaze. A sunburnt gorge, blasted rocks and a green skirt of forest rose slowly before her, and grew keener and more distinct every moment, till voices below broke the vision, and sent it away into grey space.

"How is poor dear Miss Meredith this evening?" asked Mrs. Barton, in a condoling voice.

"Very poorly, says the doctor," answered Lady John, speaking very crossly. "Miss Lovell, too, must not leave her room, and Professor Smith is as hoarse as a raven. I am sick of it all, Mrs. Barton. One does not expect people to be ill when one asks them to one's house! Does one?"

Lady John's house, to say the truth, had not been a very pleasant place for the last few days. The open window, against which Mrs. Green had vainly protested, had borne its fruits. Miss Meredith was seriously ill, and her illness shed a gloom over Lady John's guests, which deepened as she got worse.

Silvia felt wretched. Madame de l'Epine had written twice to her, saying that her father was still too ill to be removed, but yet that she hoped to be able to return soon to Saint Rémy; but she did not mention either her husband's or her brother's name. The omission stung Silvia, and Lady John's perpetual questionings made matters worse. It was always a wondering "My goodness, Mademoiselle Nardi, where can Mr. Meredith be?" Or a provoking "Is it possible Madame de l'Epine has not told you of Mr. Meredith's whereabouts?" which irritated Silvia all the more that she could not betray her irritation.

"It is all done on purpose," she thought angrily. "Joséphine does not mention her brother's name on purpose. I have no doubt he has forbidden her; and Lady John knows it, and shows me that she knows it. And it is all on purpose."

To keep out of that lady's way Silvia stayed a good deal within her room. She had few inducements to

leave it. Miss Meredith kept Ada Gray with her, and Silvia was rather frightened at the prospect of a *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Lovell. He had not, indeed, yet troubled her for a reply to the offer he had just made, but words which she feared seemed to be ever trembling on his lips, and the question which she dreaded to be meeting her in his eye. She was too proud and too honest to shun him point-blank, yet she did not seek the drawing-room or the garden without necessity; and thus, though this evening was delicious and balmy, she remained in her room a voluntary prisoner.

Lady John and Mrs. Barton had moved on, and the alley beneath Silvia's window was deserted, when suddenly Miss Gray appeared in it, as if she had that moment left the house. Silvia watched her curiously, for Miss Gray had been invisible since Miss Meredith's illness; and with a sort of displeasure she also saw Mr. Lovell joining the fair truant. They walked away side by side, seeming absorbed in close conversation.

"Let them!—what is it to me?" impatiently thought Silvia; but she turned away from the window, and found herself face to face with a person whom she at first took for Mrs. Groom, but who proved to be Mrs. Green.

"And Mrs. Groom—where is Mrs. Groom?" asked Silvia, a little startled.

"I don't know; I did not see her. I knocked, and fancied you said 'come in,' but you were so much engaged in looking out——"

"I was only breathing the air for a while. Will you not sit down, Mrs. Green?"

"No, dear. I came with a message from Miss Meredith. She begs that you will be so kind as to go

and see her. She has something to say to you, I fancy."

"What can she have to say to me?" asked Silvia a little impatiently. "But no matter, I shall go. Must I go now, Mrs. Green?"

"Well, dear, I think if you would be so kind. She is so fidgety, and she would remain alone—sent Miss Gray out of the way, even. I think—I fancy——" here Mrs. Green paused doubtfully.

Silvia, whose hand was already on the lock of the door, turned round and looked at Mrs. Green lingering behind her. She only saw her bulky form and pale face, on which the grey light from the window fell.

"What is it?" she asked, wondering—"what do you mean? What can Miss Meredith want with me?"

"Oh! it will not concern you, my dear: you will only be witness, but it may concern others very nearly," added Mrs. Green with a sigh.

"Mrs. Green, I shall not go a step further, unless you tell me what Miss Meredith wants with me."

"My dear, she has not told me, but I should not wonder if it were not about her will. I daresay she wants you to witness it, only pray don't say I told you so, dear."

"Her will! Is she so very ill?—is she going to die?" asked Silvia, much startled.

"Oh! my dear, if her little finger only aches, Miss Meredith thinks herself dead and buried; and as to her will," added Mrs. Green with a sad sigh, "I wonder how often she has made and signed it already! But mind you do not say a word of all this, my love."

"Of course not," replied Silvia, who felt rather grave; "you must show me the way, Mrs. Green, please. I don't know where Miss Meredith's room is."

"This way, my love."

And with the softest and lightest of footsteps Mrs. Green glided along the corridor, went down a flight of steps, crossed another corridor, went up another flight, and stopping at a wide folding-door, looked round to see if Silvia was following her. Finding the young girl close behind her, she laid her finger on her lips, then opened the door gently, and ushered her in.

Miss Meredith's room was one of the best in Lady John's house. It was large and luxurious, with rich crimson furniture and heavy crimson curtains, that fell from the ceiling to the floor in long deep folds. Subdued though was the light of the night lamp which burned on the round table near the bed, Silvia saw the gleam of a tall mirror, and the bright gold lines of the frames on the wall; she saw, but scarcely heeded them, so much was she impressed with the appearance of Miss Meredith herself. The sick lady sat up in bed, propped by pillows; a red spot burned on either of her sallow cheeks, her eyes were like dark fire, her thin, yellow hands twitched nervously at the white counterpane. She did not see Silvia at first, and it was in a sharp, irritated voice that she addressed Mrs. Green—

"So she would not come?" she said. "Where is she?—what is she doing?"

"Mademoiselle Nardi is here," soothingly replied Mrs. Green; "but we were delayed."

"By what?"

"By Lady John," replied Mrs. Green, with the most perfect composure.

Miss Meredith tossed restlessly about, then briefly requested Mrs. Green to leave the room. Mrs. Green obeyed without betraying either displeasure or surprise, and Silvia and Miss Meredith remained alone. After a while Miss Meredith beckoned Silvia to draw nigh, and looking at the door, she whispered,

"Open it, please. I have a fancy Green is listening."

Silvia went and opened the door, but the corridor was dark and vacant.

"All right?" suggested Miss Meredith.

"All right," laconically replied Silvia.

"Well, my dear," resumed Miss Meredith, "I have a favour to ask of you; but, first of all, can you keep a secret?"

"If you doubt it, do not trust me," composedly replied Silvia.

"Well, I suppose you can, and so can Mrs. Groom," resumed Miss Meredith, after a brief pause, "for I am going to trust her too. The fact is, I want you both to witness the signing of my will, and not talk about it. I don't want Green to know a word of it. I am not going to leave her a legacy—not I, the old toady!"

"Why not?" asked Silvia.

"Because I don't like her," replied Miss Meredith, with her cruel candour. "Well, will you do that for me?"

"It is not much," answered Silvia, with a disdainful shake of her brown head.

"'Tis all I want, my dear. Yet no—stop. Was it in Italy you learned to write?"

"Assuredly," replied Silvia, much amazed—"where else?"

"Just write your name on the back of this letter, will you?"

Silvia obeyed, a little impatiently; but Miss Meredith's feverish face expressed considerable satisfaction as she saw the little round Italian hand of Mademoiselle Nardi.

"The very thing," she said—"the very thing, my dear."

"Why, what can my writing be to you?" asked Silvia, nibbling the end of her pen.

"Very hard to imitate," said Miss Meredith, tapping her cheek with the letter—"very hard indeed; and so will Mrs. Groom's be, I have no doubt. Mind, not a word of this to Green, or, indeed, to anyone," she added, uneasily.

"Why should I talk about it?" impatiently asked Silvia—"is it anything to me?"

"Do you mind going for Mrs. Groom yourself?" asked Miss Meredith, rather earnestly.

"Not at all," good-humouredly replied Silvia, and she went immediately.

She met Mrs. Groom on the stairs, and came back with her almost at once.

"Lock the door, Mrs. Groom," said Miss Meredith, sitting up in bed, and taking a sheet of blue foolscap from beneath her pillow. "Do you see this?" she added, holding it up.

"We ain't blind," composedly replied Mrs. Groom.

"Do you see it, I say?"

"We do," soothingly answered Silvia; "we see it very well, Miss Meredith."

"Well, then, this is my last will and testament, and now watch me signing it. Are you looking?" she added, dipping her pen in the ink.

"Yes, yes, we are looking hard," said Mrs. Groom.

Miss Meredith signed the document, then beckoned them both to approach.

"Witness it," she said, at the same time jealously concealing every scrap of writing from their view. They obeyed, Silvia first, then Mrs. Groom. "And now you may go," she resumed, quite coolly, and thrusting the will under her pillow.

Mrs. Groom unlocked the door, and they went out together. Mrs. Groom spoke first.

"That's the seventh," she said gravely.

"Do you mean that there were six before this?" asked Silvia.

"I do, and that there will be an eighth, and a ninth, and a tenth, unless she dies first. It's her way," she philosophically added.

"And to whom does she leave all her property?" asked Silvia, curiously.

"No one knows, but 'taint hard to guess; to Mr. Charles when she likes him, and to the charities when she don't. You see, though she is as jealous as a cat, she drops hints. She coaxes and she threatens, and 'taint so very hard to put things together."

"Is she very rich?" asked Silvia, thoughtfully.

"Oh! she is rich, of course she is; but not so rich as Mr. Lovell, you know."

"And is he so very rich?"

"So they say; but I don't care much. You'll find the evening air rather chill, mamzelle," she added,

seeing that Silvia, instead of returning to her room, was walking towards the glass-door that opened on the garden.

Silvia replied that she would not stay long, and unwilling to hear further remonstrance, closed the door rather abruptly behind her. The air was a little chill now, and the night was dark and starless; but Silvia felt hot and feverish, and that freshness seemed to relieve her at once. She walked up and down in front of the house, listening to the voices that came from Lady John's drawing-room, looking at the patch of light on the grass which fell from one of Miss Meredith's windows, and feeling rather grave and subdued.

The thought of death comes to us in many guises. It is often full of poetry to the young, because it is so remote; to the older journeyers of life, with whom it is a goal swiftly drawing nearer, it is generally stern and unlovely, unless, indeed, in seasons of great weariness, when it seems sweet as rest and sleep.

But to all it is grave and solemn, the crowning mystery of life; and when it ceases to be a speculation, and is felt as a coming reality, doubly deep is its solemnity. Miss Meredith was much altered, and to Silvia death had seemed written on her face. She had herself prepared for that event, and though not for the first time, yet the season she had chosen for such preparation showed that she was not free from secret apprehension, which her time of life rendered more significant to one of Silvia's years.

"Is she really going to die!" thought Silvia, with sad wonder; "poor thing, poor thing!"

"Mademoiselle Nardi, I believe," said a voice behind her.

Silvia startled a little as she recognized Mr. Lovell's tones; but standing still, she composedly replied:

"Does anyone want me, Mr. Lovell?"

"Yes, poor Miss Meredith has sent for you; but no one knew where you were, and so I thought I had seen you here, and came to tell you."

"You are very good. I shall go to Miss Meredith at once."

"This is the readier way," said Mr. Lovell, opening a side door near which they stood.

Silvia followed him into a little ill-lit room, with a dull lamp on a high bracket. Mr. Lovell looked pale and rather flurried, and turned upon her in a sudden way, which told Silvia what was coming.

"Mademoiselle Nardi," he began, "I have not for the last three days renewed the subject."

"Not now—oh! pray not to-night," she entreated, with a startled look; "to-morrow, if you like, but not now."

There was just a shade of displeasure on Mr. Lovell's handsome face, for having made up his mind that it should be "now," he was not well-pleased to be put off till the next day; but he was too gentleman-like and courteous to insist, so silently, though a little sulkily, he opened the door to let Silvia pass, and bowing gravely, he allowed her to proceed alone to Miss Meredith's room. This was indeed the readier way to the sick lady's apartment, yet Silvia paused on the stairs in order to go in at once.

Why had Mr. Lovell taken so strange a time to speak to her, and why had she not given him his answer at once? She did not care about Mr. Lovell, she

did not want him, then why put off for the next day a reply that it would have been well to have got rid of at once? But Silvia was not wont to blame herself, and she soon discovered that it was all Mr. Lovell's fault.

"Why did he get me in there like a mouse in a trap?" she thought resentfully. "It was not fair, and it serves him right."

As she came to this unmerciful conclusion, Mademoiselle Nardi heard Miss Meredith's door opening, and Ada Gray's voice saying from within:

"I shall go and look for her myself."

Silvia kept in the dark, and Miss Gray, closing the door, walked away in the opposite direction, to go down the staircase up which Silvia had come with Mrs. Green to witness the signing of Miss Meredith's will.

Scarcely waiting for the young lady to be out of sight and hearing, Silvia went up to Miss Meredith's door, opened it without knocking, and entered the room, saying cheerfully,

"Here I am if you want me."

Miss Meredith, who was alone, stared at first without replying.

"Yes," she said at length, "I want you, but will you do it?"

"Do what? Sign something more?"

"No, but sit up with me to-night."

This strange and unexpected request took Silvia wholly by surprise. She drew two steps back, and looked at Miss Meredith in unmitigated astonishment.

"Do, pray do!" entreated Miss Meredith, with her eager eyes full on the young girl's face.

"But I cannot sit up—I should be sure to fall asleep!" replied Silvia deprecatingly.

"Take black coffee," was the prompt reply.

"But, Miss Meredith, why do you want me?" asked Silvia, a little desperately.

It would have been very awkward for Miss Meredith to answer this question candidly. The truth was, the doctor had ordered her an opiate, and she would not trust herself, helpless and sleeping, to Mrs. Green, Miss Gray, or her maid. Everyone of these had an interest in her will, and would not, she felt convinced, scruple at anything that might make them acquainted with its contents. Indeed Miss Meredith felt convinced that the whole world felt unbounded curiosity on this subject, and she did not except Silvia, but she thought: "I am safe with her, for she does not know where I keep my keys, and she will never find it out." So instead of giving Silvia her real reasons she said lamentably:

"Do humour a poor sick woman, child!"

Silvia's heart was moved, and taking this for an invalid's fancy, which it would be cruel to deny, she said kindly:

"I will sit up with you, Miss Meredith—I will indeed."

Miss Meredith, who had been sitting up till then, now fell back on her pillow with a sigh of relief, and uttered a "that's right!" which showed the extent of her satisfaction.

CHAPTER XI.

THE most wilful, the most resolute amongst us have once or twice in life given up their own will to that of another, and often under circumstances so distasteful, that the concession has been repented of well nigh as soon as made. This was now Silvia's case. When she went back to her own room she wondered at herself for yielding so readily to Miss Meredith's request. The thought of the vigil that lay before her made her feel both restless and unhappy. How painful and how dreary it would be in that close sick room, with that Miss Meredith and her eager eyes! Why on earth had she said yes?

Silvia was not the only one to think Miss Meredith's request an odd one, and her compliance for it uncalled for. She had not been five minutes in her room, when Lady John's silk skirts rustled in.

"My dear Mademoiselle Nardi!" she exclaimed, "what is this I hear! You are going to sit up with Miss Meredith! What can she want with *you*?"

"I am sure I don't know," replied Silvia a little impatiently.

Mrs. Groom had brought in a lamp, and its light, which fell full on Silvia's face, showed Lady John its meaning of mingled annoyance and uneasiness.

"I am very angry with Miss Meredith," resumed Lady John very crossly. "*I* never asked her here, and she took a great liberty in coming. Besides, what business has she to be ill in my house? I believe half of it is put on. Then why you or anyone should sit

up with her, when she takes an opiate that is to make her sleep all night, is more than I can imagine."

The real motive of Miss Meredith's request now flashed across Silvia's mind, and her lips parted to speak it, but she wisely checked the impulse and remained silent.

"Indeed," resumed Lady John, still speaking very crossly, "I don't see why you should sit up with that old torment, Mademoiselle Nardi. Madame de l'Epine left you in my care, and I feel bound to interfere. I am sure it will make you quite ill."

"Lady John, I have promised to do it," said Silvia with a grave reproach in her eyes, "and I must keep my word."

"Oh! if you will do it, why you will," tartly replied Lady John; "only I beg to say that I wash my hands of the whole concern." She bowed stiffly, and walked out of the room.

She was scarcely gone when Mrs. Green knocked at the door, and came in.

"My dear Mademoiselle Nardi," she began remonstratively, "is it possible that you are going to ruin your health by sitting up with Miss Meredith?"

Silvia replied that it was possible, but that she hoped not to ruin her health.

Mrs. Green raised her hands and shook her head.

"You do not know what it is!" she said, "when poor dear Miss Meredith is asleep, I shall go and relieve you for an hour or two."

"Thank you, Miss Green, but Miss Meredith will have no one else but me."

"My dear, she need not know it. She is to take an opiate, you know."

Silvia looked hard at Mrs. Green; but her florid face betrayed no guilty emotion. Her offer was evidently made in good faith. Still Silvia would not accept it, and her refusal was so plain and positive, that with a compassionate sigh Mrs. Green said she must have her way, and withdrew.

"I may as well go now," thought Silvia, "or Mrs. Barton will come and remonstrate too."

So as it was now nearly nine o'clock, she went forthwith to Miss Meredith's room.

"Mind, you will let no one in," were Miss Meredith's first words—"not a soul, not a cat!"

"Of course not," replied Silvia, sitting down in an arm-chair; "cats are very cunning—witches most of them. Well, I am no witch, Miss Meredith, but I think I know why you asked me to sit up with you to-night."

Miss Meredith stared at her with glittering eyes, in which fever was struggling against the influence of the opiate; but said not one word—perhaps she did not understand Silvia's meaning.

After a while she remarked again:

"You will let no one in!"

And before Silvia could answer, Miss Meredith's head had sunk back on her pillow; the opiate had taken effect—she was fast asleep."

"And now how shall I spend the night?" thought Silvia.

She looked around her. The red window curtains did not let in one glimpse of the night; but fell down in long straight folds from the ceiling to the floor, enclosing the room in a rich crimson gloom. A night-lamp burned on a small round table near Miss Mere-

dith's bed, and shed a little circle of light on the white counter-pane; but the sick lady's face was turned to the wall, and if it had not been for her heavy breathing, Silvia might have thought herself alone.

Spite that token of the sick lady's presence, a strong sense of loneliness, which she tried to shake off, but could not, stole upon her. Two wax lights in silver candlesticks had been placed for her on a table covered with a red cloth, and the white pages of an open volume which Miss Gray had been reading seemed to be waiting for Silvia. She took up the book, read a chapter, then put it down with a shudder. It was the story of a murderer. Jean Varot was still too keenly present to Silvia's mind for such a subject to tempt her. She pushed the book away, and leaned back in her chair with a wearied, impatient sigh.

And so time passed, till the clock struck eleven—only eleven! How should she get through the night? Sounds of voices rose from the drawing-room below every now and then, but at twelve they ceased. The party broke up; for a quarter of an hour bedroom doors opened and closed again, then the whole house became very still, and the real vigil began.

Miss Meredith had turned her face from the wall. She breathed heavily, like one struggling against pain or uneasy dreams; and Silvia saw, with mingled wonder and pity, that she held her keys firmly grasped in her hand.

“She is very rich, and I am very poor, though I am to have twenty thousand pounds,” thought the young girl, “but I need shut my door on none, I need not ask a stranger to sit by me, and I need not sleep

so, holding my keys fast, as if I feared some thief should come and rob me!"

Ever soothing to the poor are such thoughts, and so Silvia now found them. She leaned back in her chair pitying Miss Meredith, and looking dreamily at a picture on the wall. It was by a Spanish painter, and represented a nun praying; but Silvia only saw her white habit and clasped hands on a gloomy background. She looked at it, seeking for and never finding more; and the effort little by little seemed to bring on a heaviness, which stole over her too imperceptibly to be resisted.

Unconscious that an insidious enemy was at hand, Silvia made an effort to keep awake, and on a sudden, in a moment, she was fast asleep.

Was what followed a mere dream or a reality? It had the inconsistency of the one and the vividness of the other. It seemed to Silvia that after a dark gap, without thought or images, she woke back to a faint struggling sort of consciousness. She was aware of surrounding objects; of Miss Meredith in her bed, of the night lamp on the table, and again of the white figure of the nun on the wall. She looked at her and wondered why she was there. Who had brought her, and what was she doing in Lady John's house; and as these thoughts floated through her brain, she was aware of their absurdity, and said to herself, what we so often say in dreams: "I am dreaming." And even as she came to this conclusion, a low knock at the door made her think: "This is a knock. I am awake after all." But in vain she tried to speak, to ask "Who is it" or, oblivious of Miss Meredith's behest to say "Come in," she was tongue-tied. Again the knock

was repeated, and still she was mute. Then the door opened softly, and Mrs. Green's broad face looked in. After a while she entered the room, and her step, which was naturally light, fell noiselessly on the carpeted floor.

"What does she want!" thought Silvia; "is it morning?" The clock on the chimney-piece struck five, and answered the question. "How early," thought Silvia again; and as she came to this conclusion, Mrs. Green's face seemed to vanish, and once more the darkness of sleep folded its wings around her. But if she no longer saw, she still heard. There was a jingling of keys, then the click of an opening lock, then a rustling of papers—then all was quiet. But that silence itself seemed to have a wakening influence. Silvia felt bound to struggle against sleep, and rouse herself. By a strong effort she opened her eyes and looked round. Mrs. Green stood before her with a sheet of blue foolscap in her hand. "It is the will," thought Silvia, with a sudden throb, "it is the will." If so, Miss Meredith's will would scarcely be to Mrs. Green's liking, for her face looked blank and pale, and for a while she stood with the paper in her hand, a staring image of dismay.

"Mrs. Green!" said Silvia in a low voice.

The words were scarcely uttered when she was in darkness, the door closed softly, and all was still.

"But I cannot have dreamed it," thought Silvia, starting to her feet. "I cannot." She struck a light at once. Mr. Green was certainly gone, but the tokens of her recent visit were significant enough. The night lamp had burned out of itself, but the wax light had only just been extinguished; Miss Meredith's desk

stood wide open, with the key in the lock, and on the floor at her feet lay a sheet of blue foolscap. "Is that the will?" said Silvia to herself, "is that the will? Then I did not dream after all!" She picked up the paper with a trembling hand. She saw her signature and Mrs. Groom's; but she did not mind them; her eyes were riveted on the following lines, written in Miss Meredith's clear, bold, roundhand:—

"And if the said Ada Gray or the said Charles Meredith should refuse to comply, or through some previous engagement be unable to comply with this behest of mine, such refusal shall forthwith annul and render void the above mentioned legacies, which are only left to them on condition that they shall marry within twelve months of my decease."

For a while Silvia stood like one petrified, with the paper in her hand; then she went up to Miss Meredith's desk, placed the will in it, locked the desk, and gently putting the key in Miss Meredith's hand, she threw herself in her chair and wept bitterly. This, then, would be the cost of her love to Mr. Meredith: a noble fortune. On no cheaper terms could he get her. That was hard, very hard indeed to a proud girl.

"I will never have him—never!" thought Silvia drying her tears. But was Mr. Meredith's wealth or poverty indeed within her option? asked second thoughts. Was it so very certain that, knowing as he must know his imperious cousin's wishes, he was willing to pay this heavy price for Silvia's love? What certainty had she that he cared for her still, that he had not tacitly yielded to Miss Meredith's wishes, and was not actually engaged to Ada Gray?

The thought came with the cruel reality of a stab, and its bitter and jealous agony almost crushed her. Was it possible that Mr. Meredith no longer wanted her? Was that why, though so kind, he had yet been so silent? Whilst she was secretly triumphing as she thought over his wisdom, and trying him by all the caprices which a loved woman can indulge in, had she been given up? And what if he had seen through her all the time? What must he have felt? Perhaps he had pitied her, perhaps she had amused him. He was too true a gentleman to take ungenerous advantage of her folly, but why should he be blind, and why should he be so far beyond the weakness of humanity as not to be flattered by his tardy conquest? Memory, that pitiless tormentor, came back and brought many images to Silvia. She remembered the passion she had displayed during the hour of his danger; the involuntary tenderness which had appeared through her fears; the torpid weakness which had followed that trial; the silent submission of her bearing—all the hundred tokens she had given of an affection which perhaps was no longer wanted; and she felt ready to die with shame at the recollection. But Silvia was not allowed to indulge long in her own thoughts. With a deep sigh Miss Meredith woke, and leaning upon one elbow, looked around her. Silvia remained very quiet. Miss Meredith at once looked for her keys, which had fallen out of her hand on the counterpane. She took them up, jingled them, and hid them under her pillow.

"Did you let anyone in?" she asked sharply.

"I let no one in, Miss Meredith," replied Silvia.

"How are you this morning?"

"Very poorly—very poorly," moaned Miss Mere-

dith. "I will take no more opiates; the dreams are dreadful—dreadful!"

Silvia did not answer. She was wondering if Miss Meredith would put more questions; and if so, what she should say. But for once Miss Meredith was unsuspicious; bodily pain and weakness conquered her. She could only toss and moan, and at length she asked Silvia to go and look for Mrs. Green.

With a keen sense of relief Silvia left the close sick room. She was still troubled and unhappy, but the fresh air which came in upon her through an open window on the staircase seemed to bring renewed life with it, and with life that fair deceiver Hope, which has ever so golden a tale to tell to our yearning hearts.

"After all, Miss Meredith may alter her mind and her will again," she thought with the sudden buoyancy of the young, "or both Mr. Meredith and Miss Gray may refuse to comply with her wishes. I need not think of all that now."

Full of these comforting thoughts, Mademoiselle Nardi knocked at Mrs. Green's door, and after a while received a low and languid summons to "come in."

Mrs. Green was still in bed; she looked anxiously at Silvia, and asked, in a tone and with a look full of concern, how poor dear Miss Meredith was this morning.

"Very unwell, and she asks to see you, Mrs. Green."

"Does she, poor dear? Then I shall go to her at once."

Silvia remained standing near the door, looking earnestly at the elder lady.

"Mrs. Green," she asked, "what brought you to Miss Meredith's room an hour ago?"

Mrs. Green's round face expressed the deepest astonishment.

"My love, what can you mean? I have not been out of my bed once to-night."

It was Silvia's turn to stare. She had not expected such a plain and blunt denial.

"Why, I saw you," she said, "as I see you now, Mrs. Green."

"My dear, you must have been dreaming!" replied Mrs. Green very composedly, "for I certainly never went near Miss Meredith's room."

Silvia looked at her, and words rose to her lips, words in which she would have taunted Mrs. Green with opening Miss Meredith's desk and reading her will; but her Italian gift of silence came to her aid, and bade her be mute.

"It is very odd I should dream all this," she said.

"Very," drily replied Mrs. Green. "Will you be so good, my love, as to tell Miss Meredith that I am going to her directly?"

"Yes," abstractedly returned Silvia, "I will."

And she left the room, startled, perplexed, and half afraid. She did not dare go back to Miss Meredith, lest some chance question should make her betray Mrs. Green.

"She did a wrong thing," thought Silvia, "but she injured no one. I will say nothing, if I can help it."

So to keep out of Miss Meredith's reach, and also because she felt languid and ill at ease, she went down to the garden.

The morning was very calm and fair, and Silvia was quick to feel its soothing influence. One by one her grief and her fears faded away. She wilfully forgot Miss Meredith and Mrs. Green, and she allowed pleasant hopes to come to her instead of troublesome recollections—hopes fresh as the dew on the grass, and genial as the morning sunlight, which fell slantwise on the path, and played with the waters of the little fountain. What about the will? It could be set aside by some one or other. The will was nothing. Miss Meredith was no one; and everything would get right again “when Joséphine came back.”

How Madame de l'Epine's return would make all right, she did not ask of herself. Such vexing questions shake trust, and from doubt and fear Silvia had suddenly gone back to faith. Besides, if she had searched very closely in her own heart, she must have found there more perhaps than she wished to know. It would have told her that it was the hope of soon returning to the château, of meeting Mr. Meredith there, of once more living beneath the same roof with him, which gave her confidence and hope. Something else indeed she knew, and something else too she said to her own thoughts. “I have behaved very badly,” she said, shaking her head over her misdeeds; “and so I am punished. But when I see Joséphine, I will throw my arms round her neck; and tell her with a kiss that I am sorry, and somehow or other, I don't know how, she will make all right again; and Miss Meredith will alter her will, if need be, and Ada Gray will marry Mr. Lovell, or some one else, and we shall all be happy—so happy.”

Again the morning was delicious, again life was a

boon so sweet, that the mere sensation came to her heart with a sort of transport. Swiftly her young and eager imagination drew fair pictures of future bliss. She was to be good, very good, to begin with. Not wayward, but gentle as a child. She would study, since he wished it, and not vex him with her hundred follies. She did not go beyond this. She did not ask herself what would come next. No visions of wedded love troubled her heart. She did not need them. The sweet instincts of maiden modesty linger long with some, if they depart too quickly and too soon with others. It seemed happiness so perfect to see Mr. Meredith again, to feel loved and to love, that she did not care to go beyond it and question a doubtful future. The present—that present at least which her heart's fancies had conjured up, was with her, and it was very bright and fair.

Silvia had sat down on a bench in the lime-tree avenue. Her hands were clasped around her knees, her eyes were looking straight before her, and her thoughts were far away, when, through that strange sense that seems to warn us without the help of sight or of hearing, she became aware of a presence near her. She looked round, and saw Ada Gray walking lightly on the other side of the path, behind the row of lime-trees. It was very early yet—so early that Silvia wondered to see Miss Gray out at this hour; but she wondered still more when she saw her slender figure moving straight on, whilst she looked neither right nor left, but went without pause or hesitation, like one who has a purpose in view, and will not be diverted. Silvia's first thought was that something had happened, and without pausing to question the propriety of the

impulse, she rose and followed her swiftly. But ere long she stood still.

Miss Gray was going to the postern door which divided Lady John's garden from Madame de l'Epine's possessions, and by that door Mrs. Groom stood waiting, with the key in her hand. They exchanged a few words, then Miss Gray opened the door and went in, and Mrs. Groom walked back towards Lady John's house. Silvia's eyes had seen it, yet it seemed incredible. Could Madame de l'Epine be come back? Did Mrs. Groom think her still with Miss Meredith? Had something happened, some new calamity beyond her power to guess? Her face was full of these inquiries when she joined Mrs. Groom, and stood breathless before her.

"Well?" she said.

Mrs. Groom stared, and did not answer.

"What has happened?—something must have happened?"

"Nothing that I know of," composedly replied Mrs. Groom, and she walked into the house, leaving Silvia indignant and amazed.

There was a mystery—a mystery from which she was excluded, and to the knowledge of which Miss Gray was admitted. "But I will know more!—I will know all!" thought Silvia, in her anger; and not even caring to keep out of Mrs. Groom's sight, she walked deliberately back to the postern door, forgetting that it was most probably locked. It should have been locked, indeed, but was not. The lock was bad, and in her haste Miss Gray had not seen that the door was not fairly shut, so she had left it as Silvia found it, ajar.

Silvia pushed it open, but so gently that its rusty

hinges scarcely creaked; then she walked lightly and swiftly along the path she knew so well, till she once more caught sight of Miss Gray's pale green skirt moving behind the young trees. Suddenly Ada stood still in a spot where two paths met, one of which led to the château. She seemed to be watching and waiting for some one, and evidently shunned the open part whence she could have been seen. Silvia's heart beat so fast in her bosom that its throbbing almost stifled her. She did not question her own thoughts, she did not ask herself what right she had to pry in Ada Gray's secrets, but at once made herself a way through the briars and the bushes.

The antique wilderness which Silvia had first seen on entering the grounds of the château from Lady John's garden had remained almost unaltered. The little fountain still trickled in the dense bower which the growth of many years had wrought around it; but the path had been cleared close to it, and formed a passage. Silvia made the niche of the nymph her hiding-place.

The chill goddess, though sadly mildewed and moss-stained, was still faithful to her office. She still poured a faint streamlet from her urn, and it flowed down in the basin at her marble feet, motionless there for a hundred years and more. A bird had made her nest in a deep hole of the niche, and fluttered uneasily around Silvia's head. And thus leaning against the stone wall, hidden in the green gloom through which her eager eyes watched the calm figure of Ada Gray, Silvia waited motionless, breathless, all eyes, all ears, all sense.

She did not wait long. She heard a man's step.

It drew nearer. Ada smiled and held out her hand, and Mr. Meredith came towards her. Without saying a word he took her arm and led her away. "He will bring her back here," thought Silvia, and again she waited. About half an hour had elapsed when the flowing skirts of Ada Gray appeared again, and Charles Meredith, as Silvia had expected, was by her side. They stood still to talk, but their speech, though earnest, was low, and Silvia could not hear one word. But she saw their two faces—hers raised to his, his turned towards hers, both deeply earnest, and she put but one construction on this early meeting in a spot so lonely. After a while they walked on. This was all, but it was enough for Silvia, with the southern jealousy that flowed in her blood. No cruel, insidious Iago was needed to make her read what she had seen to her own ruin and undoing. She could put no innocent, harmless interpretation on Mr. Meredith's evidently concealed visit to the château, and Ada Gray's stolen interview with him. Had Mrs. Green told her the tenour of Miss Meredith's will, and was that what she was telling again to Mr. Meredith? Was she warning him in time of the cost of non-compliance? Perhaps she had rejected him formerly, but had changed her mind, and was telling him so now. Were these two laying out their plans for the future? They knew each other so well that they could do it. These conjectures, every one of which was improbable and wild, nevertheless crossed Silvia's brain; for what is there so wild that jealousy will not admit as possible and true? "Yes, that was it," she thought, and she felt pierced with jealous sorrow as she thought it. "That was it."

And she must not complain, she could not upbraid

Mr. Meredith. He had accepted the freedom she had given him, and that freedom gave him a young and lovely wife, and ample means. What wonder that she should be put by! She who had only youth, a patrician name, a doubtful twenty thousand pounds. It was not surprising, indeed, yet when memory ran over the last few weeks, and recalled hours of weakness, and trust, and abandonment, Silvia burned with resentment and shame.

"I cannot bear it," she thought. "I will not bear it!" was her rebellious comment on her bitter story.

She left the niche, heedless of the briars which tore her garments as she passed through them. She made her way to the postern door; it was ajar as she had left it, and with swift and hurried steps Silvia entered Lady John's demesnes, and walked through the lime-tree walk, where life had seemed so delicious an hour ago. As she reached the fountain a voice said courteously:

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Nardi."

Silvia had been walking with downcast eyes; she raised her look slowly, her thoughts lay too deep for her to feel startled, and she saw Mr. Lovell. He stood before her bare-headed, smiling, courteous, and yet with that subdued doubt and trouble on his face which said plainly:

"I stand before the arbitress of my fate."

Silvia looked at him without speaking, and her colour rose, and her eyes took a deeper light as she looked. There he stood, the kind, honourable, handsome, rich gentleman, who loved her—the man whom every woman had wished and had failed to win. Here was a noble revenge on the ingrate, and a proud de-

fiance. He hid from her, no doubt, lest he should prostrate her with sorrow! Let him come and find her Mr. Lovell's betrothed wife. Without a word, and, alas! without a second thought but this, she stretched out her hand and, unasked, placed it in his.

Mr. Lovell was not an imaginative man, and imagination has a good deal to do with the romance of passion. He was not, either, a man of very warm and strong feelings, but such as he was his love for Silvia had reached the very depths of his being. He had had since the evening before very little hope of prevailing, and now, without any effort, without pleading or persuading, she was his! He was too much moved to speak at once. He looked at her happy, troubled, agitated. And whilst he pressed her little hand within both his, he said in a broken voice: "God bless you!—you do not know how happy you have made me."

Silvia startled and gave him a scared look, for there was a hidden sting in the words. How happy she had made him! Her revenge, and not his happiness, had been her object. She knew it, and with the knowledge came remorse and fear. They came but too late.

"I hope I don't intrude!" said Lady John's voice behind them.

"Not at all," heartily replied Mr. Lovell, who now looked beaming.

"I cannot tell you too soon, Lady John, that I owe to you the great happiness of my life."

And drawing Silvia's arm within his, Mr. Lovell did indeed look the happiest and the proudest of men. Lady John smiled ironically, and congratulated, and Silvia stood silent and pale between them, thinking: "I must abide by the fate I have chosen."

CHAPTER XII.

It is seldom that we are allowed to linger over a great joy, and so Mr. Lovell now found. Scarcely had Lady John considerately walked away, leaving him alone with Silvia, when the sonorous clock in the hall struck the hour.

"By Jove! I must be gone!" exclaimed Mr. Lovell, looking very much vexed. A gleam of hope shone in Silvia's eyes.

"Are you going to Paris again?" she asked quickly.

Mr. Lovell stared.

"Oh! no, only down to Saint Rémy," he answered; "but the fact is, I should be there now."

The light passed away from Silvia's pale face.

"It is an awful bore," said Mr. Lovell, hesitatingly; "but it is an appointment, and the fact is, I never break an appointment."

And this was true. Mr. Lovell had that noble inability to break his word, even in small things, which characterizes some men.

"I will not detain you," said Silvia, languidly.

She walked away a few steps, but he walked by her side.

"You do not seem quite well, Mademoiselle Nardi," he said, in a low, uneasy tone. "Is there—is anything amiss?"

He looked at her with the doubt he could not help feeling in his eyes.

"I sat up with Miss Meredith last night," replied Silvia, as if this were sufficient explanation.

"So you did. Awful bore that! Well, I must go."

He looked as if he could have remained for ever with her; but Silvia was walking on towards the house, as a matter of course, and Lady John's voice was heard in the hall, so there was nothing to be gained by staying with her.

"I must go," he said, a little desperately; and, undetained by Silvia, he went.

Mr. Lovell felt very happy. There is a sweetness in the success of love which is like the reaching of a safe haven, after long tossing on a restless sea. Very smooth had been Mr. Lovell's course through life. No rough billows had carried him hither and thither, shown him bright shores and cast him on quicksands. Life had been easy to this wealthy young man, and he had been easy to life. He had a calm temper, he was good-natured; most things bored him, to be sure, but his was a passive sort of *ennui*, a thing to be endured rather than a pain to be keenly suffered. But because he had had no griefs he had had no joys; life had been grey to him, a soft, hazy day, without either dark stormy clouds, or glorious sunshine. And now for the first time the sun dawned above his dull horizon, and Mr. Lovell wondered at the warmth which stirred the torpid blood within his veins. He was conscious of this change, and he liked it, and felt what a terrible bore it was to be parted from Silvia just then. He felt this bore all the more that the appointment he was going to keep was with Mr. Meredith, whom he did not like, and about a matter which he detested. "Why had that awful bore of a fellow, Charles Meredith, sent so pressing a request to meet him in that lane, and all to talk about that other awful bore, his rascally brother-

in-law? Had he not had enough of mineral oil, and Monsieur de l'Epine, and Canada, and the whole concern? He was a fool, he was, to have yielded to Miss Gray's entreaties, and promised to go. But the fact was he did not know how to say 'No' to a woman, and so she had made him do it!"

There was, indeed, that infirmity in Mr. Lovell's nature. He could not deny the fair sex any reasonable request. Nay, if Ada Gray had asked him point-blank to marry her, he would most probably have said "Yes," or, at least, found it too hard to say "No." So, when she came, sent by Mr. Meredith, begging for a speedy and secret interview in a quiet lane which wound between Lady John's house and the château of Saint Rémy, Mr. Lovell was in some sort compelled to comply. He could have denied Mr. Meredith's request with cold civility, have informed him "It was wholly useless to discuss the matter in hand," or regretted "that he really could not gratify Mr. Meredith in that particular case;" but when the fair Ada said gravely, and yet very sweetly, "I hope, Mr. Lovell, you will be kind enough to do this!" Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers, and succumbed at once, feeling only too thankful that this charming messenger had not asked him to do more than meet Charles Meredith in the lane.

But it was not in Ada's power, nor indeed in any woman's power, to make this meeting less distasteful than it was to Mr. Lovell. The annoyance of being parted from Silvia so speedily could be got over, but not that dislike of Mr. Meredith, which would have made him shun him for ever.

There is a natural want of sympathy between some

men—a sort of passive aversion, which does not stoop to acts, nor even to bitter speech, but which is none the less deep and real. Mr. Lovell was by no means a man of ungenerous mind—he had no heroic greatness, no magnanimity, qualities which are rare enough, but then he was not mean or narrow-minded. So he was satisfied with disliking Mr. Meredith, and he never showed it in word or deed. He disliked him, perhaps, because that gentle yet ardent nature was the living censure of his apathetic, indolent temper; and there might be, though he knew it not, some secret envy mingled with his dislike, just as there was, but he knew it, some contempt blending with Mr. Meredith's aversion for Mr. Lovell, or rather Mr. Lovell's society. What had he, the impassioned man of the nineteenth century, the man of calm temper but strong feelings, in common with this bored gentleman of fortune?

But they were both men of the world, and when Mr. Lovell entered the cool shady lane where Mr. Meredith was already walking up and down waiting for him, the dark look passed away from his face, and there was nothing but grateful courtesy on Charles Meredith's handsome countenance.

"You will not wonder, Mr. Lovell, that I should wish to speak to you," began Mr. Meredith. "I need scarcely say on what subject. I hope I have not chosen too inconvenient a place or an hour?"

"Now will do very well," answered Mr. Lovell, "and here, too, if you don't mind."

He had no wish to bring Mr. Meredith to Lady John's house, or in the vicinity of Silvia.

"Mr. Lovell," began Charles Meredith, "I must

begin by telling you that Monsieur de l'Epine is *not* gone to Canada."

Mr. Lovell, on hearing this, betrayed just as much surprise as a raising of his eyebrows could express. Then he said "Indeed!" then he took out a cigar, offered another to Mr. Meredith, who declined it, lit his own, began to smoke, evidently waiting for more.

"But the money is none the less gone," continued Mr. Meredith. "He speculated and lost every farthing of it on the very day of his arrival in Paris."

This time Mr. Lovell expressed no surprise, but nodded and said,

"Just so."

"Justly considering all lost, he took flight. It was chance that made us meet, and which put him so far in my power, that he was obliged to confess to me every word of this terrible fraud. I will not trouble you with the particulars. Sufficient is it if I tell you that Monsieur de l'Epine has made a clean breast of it, and that I am fully acquainted with the nature and extent of the unfortunate transactions between you and him."

"Just so," said Mr. Lovell, nodding.

"I need not say how hard a trial this is to his wife, his uncle, and myself."

"It is a trial," confessed Mr. Lovell; "yet if I were you, Mr. Meredith, I should just mind it that much," he added, blowing away the smoke of his cigar. "There is an old bore of a story about the leopard or the tiger and his spots," he added, yawning, and throwing his cigar away, "and it applies wonderfully to Louis de l'Epine. He did me yesterday, he is quiet

to-day, and all that, but he will just begin again and do some one else to-morrow."

"He shall not!" cried Mr. Meredith, turning white with anger. "My stepfather and I have threatened him, and he knows that we do not threaten in vain, with the hand of the law. We will have him pronounced incapable of directing his own actions, and spending his own money, and though that is a legal fiction in his case, since he has no money left to spend, it will take from him the power of making any further victims."

"Just so," replied Mr. Lovell. "Quite right."

"Mr. Lovell, Monsieur de l'Epine has very reluctantly confessed the amount of his liabilities to you—four thousand five hundred pounds. May I ask if that amount, which my stepfather confirms, is correct?"

Mr. Lovell looked puzzled.

"Why, no," he said, "not quite."

"But it is half, at least?"

"Why, no, not half either."

Mr. Meredith bit his lip.

"Then how much did he get from you, may I ask?"

"Something like fourteen thousand. Don't trouble," he added good-naturedly. "I don't mind telling you that I was going to take law proceedings against him; but since he has nothing left, perhaps I had better not."

"The villain!—the low, dishonourable villain!" said Mr. Meredith between his set teeth. His grey eyes burned like fire, his face was colourless, his very lips were white. Mr. Lovell looked at him with something

between wonder and envy. He had found it excessively disagreeable to be swindled out of his money, he had also anticipated some sort of excitement and interest from the law proceedings he had contemplated taking against Monsieur de l'Epine, but neither loss nor lawsuit could have roused him to the state of angry fervour in which he now saw Mr. Meredith; so he marvelled and also envied, that a matter in which neither his name nor his fortune was concerned should rouse him thus.

"Fourteen thousand pounds!" said Mr. Meredith, after a while. "I trust, Mr. Lovell, you will not be so heavy a loser. But may I ask how he came to get so large a sum out of you?"

"Well, it is not exactly pleasant to go over it all again," expostulated Mr. Lovell, looking rather bored. "He got round the Captain and me with his mineral oil, and we were to find the capital, you know. Well, the very morning we got to Paris he had a private talk with me, and persuaded me to raise my share of the capital to fourteen thousand pounds, which he went and gambled, you say."

"And you gave him that money?" said Mr. Meredith—"you actually handed over that large sum to him?"

"Why, no, but I sold out, and I let him get the money from the broker."

"And you had no doubt, no suspicion?" asked Mr. Meredith, almost angrily; "you consulted no one in a matter so important?"

"Why, no. I was rather in a hurry to get away; and as to lawyers and solicitors, and all that, they are not over-safe, you know."

Mr. Meredith bit his lip again; he found it hard to be silent—he found it hard not to censure, as it deserved, the indolence and careless trust which had led to results so disastrous. But the sharp and bitter words which rose to his lips had to be forced back, and as calmly as he could he said,

“Perhaps, Mr. Lovell, you wonder why I am raking up this painful and disgraceful matter, and what my object is in compelling you, as it were, to go over it again with me?”

“Why, yes, I do,” candidly acknowledged Mr. Lovell, who was getting very much bored; “you see, when a man has been swindled—I beg your pardon.”

“Pray don’t; you have used the right word,” replied Charles Meredith; but his pale cheeks flushed as he made the bitter acknowledgment.

“To the tune of fourteen thousand pounds,” continued Mr. Lovell; “and when it’s in some sort his own doing, why, he would just as soon not be talking about it.”

“Very true, and therefore, having ascertained the extent of Monsieur de l’Epine’s defalcations, I come to the gist of my discourse, and to the purport of this interview. My stepfather, my sister, and I have resolved to refund this money to you, Mr. Lovell. This we can only do by yearly instalments,” he added, without seeming to notice Mr. Lovell’s stare of surprise. “I trust that, spite this drawback, you will agree to our plan. The law would certainly punish the man who so basely robbed you, but the money is spent and gone, and the law would not give you back one farthing of your fourteen thousand pounds.”

“Come, come, that’s nonsense,” said Mr. Lovell,

recovering from his surprise, and speaking in his careless, good-natured tone. "What have *you* to do with that fellow?—besides, I daresay I shall not go to law, after all," he added, suppressing a slight yawn. "I have a fancy it would bore me dreadfully; moreover, I might not be able to get out of it again."

"Very true, therefore I trust the more that you will see no objection to the plan I have proposed. The amount is so much larger than we expected, that it will take more years to refund; still, it can be done, and though you will have undergone serious inconvenience, you will, I trust, have been no loser."

Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers, and looked puzzled.

"Well, but," he argued, "what have you to do with that?—what has anyone to do with it? I never looked to you or to your stepfather, or to Madame de l'Epine for security, you know."

"Of course not, and if my sister were dead to-morrow, neither her father nor I, Mr. Lovell, would give one farthing towards hiding her husband's disgrace, but for her sake we are ready to make any sacrifice."

"But then you will expect me not to go to law?"

"Yes, of course."

Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers again. Mr. Lovell was rich, and accustomed to have his own way. He liked to go to law, or not to go to law, and follow his pleasure in that matter, as well as in most others, and therefore Mr. Meredith's proposed restitution, extending, too, over a certain number of years, was unpalatable to him.

"Well, you see," he remarked, after a while, "I have had the bore of losing the money, and I *have* talked about it, so I don't see what good getting four-

teen thousand pounds in ever so many years would do me; or as to that, what good paying back will do you."

"Simply this, Mr. Lovell: no one on seeing you in the same room with my stepfather, my sister, and myself shall say, 'The nephew, husband, and brother-in-law of these three swindled Mr. Lovell out of fourteen thousand pounds, and Captain de l'Epine, Madame de l'Epine, and Mr. Meredith looked on passively. For the honour of her name they made no sacrifice, deprived themselves of not one enjoyment, spent not one shilling.'"

"Well, but how will Miss Meredith like that?" asked Mr. Lovell.

"It is our concern, not hers."

"Just so, but how will she like it?"

"Not at all, I dare say; indeed this is a matter on which I have little doubt, and which I am resolved to settle before I see her."

Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers again.

"Why should you risk that?" he persisted.

Mr. Meredith smiled, and did not answer. He was immovable, and Mr. Lovell saw it. Still he could not make up his mind. He felt a strange reluctance to have the money refunded to him. Perhaps if he had searched his heart very closely, he would have found that he did not like Charles Meredith to stand in such a relation to him; that there was indeed a sort of satisfaction in having been robbed by that young man's brother-in-law, and being thus far his superior. But this it seemed could not be. If he refused Charles Meredith's offer, and resorted to the law, he placed himself in the unenviable position of a bitterly vindictive

man, who prefers revenge and the disgrace of an innocent family to restitution.

So when Mr. Meredith, calmly resuming the subject, said composedly:

"May I trust, Mr. Lovell, that you agree to this?"

Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers, and said slowly and reluctantly, but very plainly:

"Well, yes, I suppose I must; but I cannot say that I like it."

"Then I am the more obliged to you for your compliance," said Mr. Meredith, smiling, "I shall call on Miss Meredith presently, and then if you like we can settle the particulars."

Mr. Lovell assented, and on that agreement they parted.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY JOHN was a woman of the world. She could not indeed lay claim to the policy of non-intervention, which she never practised; but no government ever submitted with a better grace to the *fait accompli* than did Lady John. It cost her no effort to be amiable and congratulatory in the present case.

Since Mr. Lovell would not have Ada Gray, there was no help for it, and since he would have Silvia, the future Mrs. Lovell became another sort of person in a moment.

So when Mr. Lovell was gone, and Silvia and her ladyship met in the hall, it was quite civilly that Lady John said:

"So, my dear, you have secured the great prize."

"Yes," passively replied the young girl. "I have, as you say, secured the great prize, since Mr. Lovell is such."

"Well, my dear, he is a young man, a handsome man, an amiable man, besides being a rich one. What more would you have?"

"Nothing," laconically replied Silvia. "I am very happy, Lady John."

"You ought to be, my dear; but you do not look so."

"I am tired and sleepy," said Silvia, a little impatiently.

"Ah! to be sure; well, I shall not detain you."

Silvia said not a word, but walked away. Lady John's look followed her slender figure, and down-cast eyes, and hands clasped, and graceful Grecian head.

"A cool young lady," she thought.

Cool! Silvia's blood was not cool just then. It flowed in her veins like liquid fire, parching her very being. She had done it, and she did not repent it; but still she had done it, and it rose higher and higher like prison walls, which she must never scale again, and deeper and deeper she felt sinking within the abyss.

She went up to her room, she laid herself down on her bed, and the feeling would not pass away. Still she rebelled against it, and having a strong will, she was not quite unsuccessful. She said to herself that Mr. Lovell was very fond of her, and very agreeable, and very rich.

He would give her all she could wish for! A carriage, a fine house, diamonds. But Silvia turned her face to the wall, and felt sick: diamonds recalled Mr.

Meredith's face and look on that day when Mr. Fox had come and told her of her inheritance.

"Yet I must bear it," she thought, nerving herself; "and bear it I will," she added, getting up, and dressing leisurely and carefully. She would not try to forget—it was useless, so when she was dressed, she went and paid Miss Georgie Lovell a visit.

Miss Lovell had caught a violent cold on the night of the fire, and been a close prisoner ever since. Silvia found her sitting up, and going through a round of school-girl bread and butter with evident relish and appetite; but very low-spirited and disconsolate at her captivity, spite these signs of returning health.

"Oh! you darling!" she cried, enthusiastically, as Silvia's pale face looked in at the door; "do come and have breakfast with me. I've got such a tea-pot!—such tea! It must be what Lady John calls her caravan tea."

"No, thank you," replied Silvia, sinking down in a chair, and looking at Miss Lovell's babyish face with something like envy; "I did not come for tea."

"You're a duck!" cried Miss Lovell, still enthusiastic. "You don't know how sick of my life I have been. Only think," she added, with an expression of profound disgust, and a great puckering of her eyebrows, "Mrs. Barton, who came up yesterday, to read Milton to me."

Silvia started. She had seen Milton in Mr. Meredith's hands the day before he went away.

"Now," continued Miss Lovell, with considerable energy, "if there is a man I hate, it's that Milton. I had to go through him with Miss Jennings when I was thirteen, and read him in character."

"In character!" vaguely said Silvia; and she remembered the brown old book bound in calf skin, with edges of faded gold, over which she had seen his pale, handsome face bending.

"Yes, in character," continued Miss Lovell; "I had to speak like the angels speak" (Miss Lovell's grammar was one of her weak points,) "and Miss Jennings was so awfully cross. 'Open your mouth, Georgie,' she'd say; 'do you suppose the Angel Gabriel keeps his mouth shut?' Or, 'Do you suppose Adam gabbled in that fashion when he was talking to Eve?'"

Silvia looked very earnestly at Miss Lovell.

"I came up to tell you," she said, "Mr. Lovell has asked me to marry him, and—and I have consented."

The bread and butter nearly dropped from Miss Lovell's hand, and her colour just faded away a little as she stared at Silvia.

"You lucky girl," she said at length, with a little sigh.

"Lucky!—why so lucky?" cried Silvia, with a sudden flash in her eyes.

"Oh! because he's such a brick, and so rich, you know," was the candid answer.

"I am not poor," replied Silvia, with a haughty smile; "I am to have twenty thousand pounds."

"Still you are a lucky girl," persisted Miss Lovell. "Ada will be ready to tear your eyes out when she knows it."

Silvia rose, much offended.

"Why should all the luck, as you call it, be on my side?" she asked warmly. "Am I worth nothing, Miss Lovell?"

"Oh! you're very nice," candidly replied Miss Lovell; "but then he's such a grand fellow, you know."

There were tears in Silvia's eyes, and her lips quivered as she said,

"I am sorry I came near you. I did not know girls were so cheap, Miss Lovell, or perhaps I should have left you your cousin."

"But since he wouldn't have me," impatiently said Miss Lovell. "Why, look ye here. You know very well that I, that Ada, that any girl would have him, if he'd only ask. But if he won't ask, we can't," added Miss Lovell, still bent on candour.

"Good morning," said Silvia, coldly; and she walked out of the room with injured dignity in her looks.

The triumph she was supposed to have achieved stung her. She did not want to secure the great prize, as Lady John called Mr. Lovell; she wanted to be the prize whom Mr. Lovell had snatched from Mr. Meredith. She wanted the man who had loved her, and whose love she had disdained, to feel that when he thought she was to be had for the asking, he committed an error. She longed to impress the fact on the whole world, and the silence which maiden reserve and pride commanded was almost more than she could bear. Indeed, and as the event showed her, it was also more than she was quite equal to. She had scarcely left Miss Lovell's room when she met Mrs. Green, with a peculiar expression of trouble on her face.

"My dear," she said anxiously, "Miss Meredith is in such a way for you; do go to her, my love, if you can; and pray," she added, looking hard at Silvia,

"don't excite her. Poor dear, she is in such a temper!"

Miss Meredith was in a temper, to use Mrs. Green's words. She was sitting up in her chair by the window, and received Silvia with much sharpness. Silvia bore it all passively, not even minding her. Leaning back in her chair and looking straight before her, she once again went through the evil of the past night. She looked at the nun praying on the wall; she saw Mrs. Green's pale face; she read Miss Meredith's will again, and she thought—

"If I had not read it, perhaps I could not have done it; but it is done, and I do not repent it."

"And where is Ada?" querulously exclaimed Miss Meredith; "why does she not come near me? Do go and look for her, Green, will you?"

Obedient Mrs. Green left the room. At once Miss Meredith's manner changed. She turned full on Silvia, and resting both her hands on the arms of her chair, she said with imperative suddenness:

"Who came in last night? Was it Green—was it Miss Gray? Whom did you let in?"

"No one," answered Silvia coldly.

"But some one came in and was at my desk. I am sure it was Miss Gray, and that is why she never came near me this morning."

"Oh! Miss Gray was too much engaged to come and see you this morning, Miss Meredith," replied Silvia, speaking with unconscious bitterness.

Miss Meredith's black eyes sparkled.

"She was with Mr. Lovell, was she?" she said angrily, "that was it, eh?"

Silvia coloured, and said, with something like disdain:

"Pray labour under no such uneasiness, Miss Meredith; and pray tell Mr. Meredith and Miss Gray that they need not hide from me. Their movements are nothing to me, and so far as I am concerned there need have been no mystery about their meeting this morning."

Miss Meredith stared full in Silvia's face.

"You saw them," she said at length. "Pray where did you see them?"

She spoke quietly, yet the tone of her voice struck Silvia.

"They were talking in the grounds of the château. You do not object to that, do you, Miss Meredith?"

"Not at all," replied the lady. "When people have made up their minds to marry it is but fair they should talk."

"Yes," said Silvia, biting her lip, "it is but fair indeed."

The entrance of Mrs. Green, followed by Ada Gray, calm and lovely, as usual, checked all further discourse. Silvia's colour fled as she saw her. All was over, but not an hour ago she had undergone the keenest agony through this quiet-looking girl, and she could not forget it. She could not endure her presence, the room felt stifling, her heart beat, her brow throbbed, and reckless of whatever interpretation might be put upon her behaviour, she rose and left the room abruptly.

"Well, my dear," said Miss Meredith, very kindly, "how are you this morning? I have missed you so. Where have you been?"

"I went to look at the château. It is not so much damaged as I thought," replied Ada, with slight hesitation.

"And when are they all coming back to it?" asked Miss Meredith.

Ada Gray looked at her, but never had Miss Meredith seemed calmer and more composed than she did then. Never had her harsh features betrayed less token of jealousy or suspicion or anger or unkind feeling of any sort. She knew nothing.

"Madame de l'Epine is expected very shortly," she replied composedly.

"I wish Charlie would make haste and come," pettishly said Miss Meredith. "I am sick of this place."

Miss Gray's gentle smile, which ever seemed to acquiesce and yet said nothing, flitted across her face.

"You must get me Charles's present address," said Miss Meredith, watching her keenly, without seeming to do so. "I suppose some one knows it. Would you mind getting it for me?"

"Certainly not. Do you wish me to ask for it now, Miss Meredith?"

"If you do not mind taking the trouble, dear, I should like it of all things."

Miss Gray graciously said it was no trouble, and glided out of the room with a light step. When the door had closed upon her Miss Meredith turned to Mrs. Green and said in her cold hard voice:

"Green, that little Nardi says—do you mind me, Green?"

"Yes, Miss Meredith, of course I do."

"Then don't be watching that fly; let it buzz away,

will you? Well, little Nardi says she saw Charlie Meredith at the château this morning."

"In—deed!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, with a look of profound interest.

"Yes, she does. And she saw him with that sly Ada Gray, who is gone to fetch his direction for me. Do you understand, Green?"

Mrs. Green understood that Mr. Meredith did not want to see his cousin, and she said so.

"But do you know why he does not want to see me, Green? Eh! do you know it?"

Mrs. Green submissively confessed that she had no conception of Mr. Meredith's motives for behaviour so extraordinary.

"Then I will tell you, I will tell you," irefully resumed Miss Meredith. "His precious sister married a precious rascal, who has got into a precious mess, out of which my precious cousin wishes to get him, without my knowledge, or, at least, without having speech with me. But if he thinks to squander his money on that low French swindler," added Miss Meredith, with sparkling eyes, "and then fall back on my inheritance, he is very much mistaken—very much mistaken, Green, I can tell you."

Mrs. Green looked shocked, but was prudently silent.

Miss Meredith brooded awhile over her wrongs, then said in an altered tone:

"That sly Gray is going to come back with Charlie's direction. Wait till she comes, and when she has given it to me—do you just go to the château—any pretence will do, and see Charlie. Mind you must *see* him, I don't want him, or care for him to see you—'tis of no

consequence; but you must *see* him with your own eyes."

Mrs. Green nodded, and the entrance of Lady John, who came to see how her guest was, checked all further conversation on that subject.

Lady John was full of news, and felt the most laudable anxiety to open her budget.

"I suppose Mademoiselle Nardi has told you," she began.

"Told what?" suspiciously asked Miss Meredith.

"Oh! that she is engaged to Mr. Lovell. Quick work, eh?"

"Is she?" shortly said Miss Meredith; "well, so much the better for her, Lady John."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Green.

"Now, Green, don't be stupid. What is it to us! But it serves Ada right, I always told her so."

Lady John looked amazed.

"Dear me," she said, "I thought it was a settled thing between Miss Gray and Mr. Meredith."

"Did you? Perhaps you also thought it was a settled thing that I should die, and make room for them, Lady John."

"Oh! no," kindly replied the lady of the house; "Ada has great expectations, and Mr. Meredith a fair income."

"I am glad to hear it," drily interrupted Miss Meredith. "A lovely day, Lady John. Oh, there's Ada."

Miss Gray entered as she spoke. She held a slip of paper in her hand, and gave it to Miss Meredith.

"Thank you, my love," graciously said her relative. "Green, do go and get me a few flowers, will you?"

Mrs. Green understood the signal, and left the room.

"I suppose you know Mr. Lovell and little Nardi are engaged," pitilessly resumed Miss Meredith, looking full at her victim's face.

"So Lady John has told me," was Miss Gray's composed reply.

Lady John rose, and taking Ada's arm, said coolly:

"Miss Meredith looks *very* tired; come away, dear; we had better leave her alone. Besides, it will soon be time for breakfast."

Miss Meredith, who would have liked to keep and torment Miss Gray, frowned on Lady John, who, utterly impenetrable to such signs of displeasure, walked away with her young friend.

"Madame de l'Epine, of course, does not know what has taken place," said Lady John, when they were out on the landing. "I wonder how long she wants me to keep Mademoiselle Nardi? Pleasant to have all the love-making going on in one's house, is it not?"

Miss Gray answered with the common-place truisms usual on such occasions. She was too well-bred, and had been too thoroughly disciplined by life and the world, to betray her feelings, yet they were sufficiently keen and bitter.

It would be hard to say that the love, rare as spirit apparitions which la Rochefoucault speaks of, had struck its roots in her very heart. Miss Gray, indeed, had not escaped the destiny of most women, and when she was eighteen she had loved, if not very passionately, at least very truly, a man who had simply and coolly done his best to secure her affections, then as simply

and coolly jilted her. It was a very common case, and Miss Gray had the wisdom to make no moan about it. Very few knew or suspected this episode of her youth. It had had its birth in a remote country-house, and there lived its brief life, and died its bitter death. Miss Meredith, Charles Meredith, Lady John herself, had no suspicion of it. Her little barque had gone down, and no one even knew that it had ever been ventured on the deep waters. Hers was one of the thousand wrecks which are unrecorded in the great log-book of life, for which there is no pity, no sorrow. And Miss Gray bore her trouble pretty much in that spirit. She did not lament much over herself, nor hold life a void because its fairest blossom was withered thus early. She went to balls, to parties, to *déjeûners*, to picnics, and was amiable and lovely as before the time of her sorrow. She thought of marriage as most girls think of it, but she now considered it especially as a matter of business. As a matter of business Miss Gray wished for an agreeable, rich, and well-born husband. Her taste was too refined to make her barter youth and beauty for money, and her heart was too seared and blunted by past experience to let love weigh a feather in the scales of her consideration. Mr. Meredith she would have liked very well, had he been willing, but Mr. Lovell she liked a great deal better—for one was wealthy in the present, and the other was rich only in the future. Ada Gray liked actual possession; she had great expectations herself, and knew their worth; but, unluckily, if Mr. Meredith showed little inclination to comply with that portion of his cousin's wishes which concerned Miss Gray, Mr. Lovell was scarcely more ardent. He liked her, and he admired her, the seat near hers was that

which he preferred; he could pull his whiskers in her vicinity for hours with evident satisfaction, but beyond that placid admiration Mr. Lovell did not seem inclined to go, and Miss Gray lacked the charm which should rouse him from his torpor. She knew it, but she was too delicate and too proud to court any man, so she waited for a warmer liking, which came not, and little by little she gave this obdurate gentleman all she had to give.

It was not much. Very few drops had remained in the bottom of the cup which her ingrate lover had poured out on the dust, but it was all that was left to Ada Gray, and she knew it. If Mr. Lovell had been a poor man he would never have had that little, such as it was. The man whom she liked in him was young, handsome, good-natured, and especially wealthy. Not one of these attributes could she spare him. Illness would have cooled, and poverty would have daunted her. A perfectly generous affection is a rare thing, and is seldom felt twice in a human life. Ada Gray laid no claim to the romance of devotedness. She was what many women are, a little cool, a little selfish, a little matter-of-fact, with no more imagination than was sufficient to prevent her from stooping to that utter degradation implied by the terrible word vulgarity, and no more warmth than was enough to save her from the reproach of callousness.

Such was her liking for Mr. Lovell, such were the feelings over which Silvia's reckless jealousy now unconsciously triumphed. They were neither fervent nor deep, yet Miss Gray suffered. Our likings and dislikings are very complex sort of things. Pride, self-love, ambition, were hurt to the quick by Silvia's suc-

cess. Mere passiveness would have made Mr. Lovell hers with time, if this bright and vehement young Italian had not come like a shooting star across their quiet course.

“I am handsomer than she is; I shall be richer than she can ever be; I have a knowledge of the world, of literature, art, science—she is too indolent ever to attain to; above all, I like him ten times better than she does, and yet she wins, and I am cast aside!”

Such were Ada Gray's bitter reflections as, after leaving Miss Meredith's room, she went downstairs with Lady John, listening to and placidly answering that lady's pettish complaints concerning the inconveniences of having a pair of lovers in one's house.

This, too, Ada would have to see and endure, and it would be all the harder that every one of Lady John's guests knew what her hopes and her aim had been. But this world's votaries often rise to heights of heroism, which would secure them a shining place in the next, did their ambition lie there. Miss Gray, who was not, indeed, quite unprepared for it, had heard the announcement of Mr. Lovell's engagement without flinching, and she was now ready to look on with the same cool fortitude. Of course it would be unpleasant, very unpleasant, not to say bitter; but it would probably not last long, and, inevitable, inexorable argument, it must be done.

The old gladiator learned to die gracefully for the pleasure of the Roman people. One often wonders at that. Why should he thus please his tormentors, who cried so exultingly, “*Habet!—habet!*” Why did he not make some desperate effort for revenge, and, armed as he was, drag down a soul or two to Hades,

and give an extra freight to grim Charon's barque? It is amazing; but if circus, and gladiator, and shouting crowd have drifted away on the shadowy sea of time, man is not altered since Cæsar read his despatches whilst poor wretches were dying in the dusty arena below. There is still in the lookers-on the same callous indifference to suffering—the same pitiless sentence passed on the agony we feel not; and on that of the victim, the same insane yielding to the tormentors, and the same weak craving to die gracefully, and without a moan. No doubt it is well, in some respects, that it should be so. It would be awkward, not to say unpleasant, if our gladiators were to turn savage, and go about giving sword-thrusts amongst poor spectators, instead of bleeding to death in decorous silence. The world is much more silent, and composed, and well-bred, and altogether pleasant than it would be otherwise, certainly; but, on the other hand, is it so very sure that silence is an unmixed good? Are there not wrongs which require proclaiming to be redressed, and is the acquiescence of the victims the safest road to justice or to retribution?

Silent, however, and not merely silent, but also cheerful, Miss Gray was resolved to be. She was soon put to the test. At the foot of the staircase they met Silvia. Ada went up to her, and laying her hand on the young Italian's arm, she said, playfully—

“May I be allowed to congratulate Mademoiselle Nardi?”

The colour deepened on Silvia's cheek, and she clenched her little hands with a strong effort. If Lady John had not been present, she would have answered with a taunt, and asked if she should not congratulate

Miss Gray, after what she had seen this morning. But the presence of the mistress of the house sealed her lips, and she forced herself to utter a rather disdainful, "You are too good—you are too good!"

"And Mr. Lovell too," persisted Ada, as he now opened the glass door, and came in from his interview with Charles Meredith—"shall I not be allowed to congratulate Mr. Lovell too?" And she held out her hand so calmly, so frankly, that Mr. Lovell, who had been rather flurried at her first address, was thoroughly disconcerted as he accepted the pledge of amity thus offered to him.

Silvia looked at them with impatience, and not caring to stay with them, entered the drawing-room, which happened to be empty. She did not thus escape Mr. Lovell, for he followed her in at once; nor did he thus escape Lady John and Miss Gray. Just as he had seated himself by Silvia's side, they came in, as a matter of course.

"Where were you?" he fondly whispered. "I went to look for you in the garden, but the bird was flown."

"I believe it is the habit of birds to fly," tartly replied Silvia.

Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers, and smiled. That was just what he liked—what he wanted—not a tame girl, but one with a sharp and lively tongue.

"How do you spend your time?" asked Silvia, suddenly turning on Mr. Lovell—"I mean," she added, as he stared, "what do you do usually?"

"Oh! anything that turns up," he languidly replied. "I went in for Hebrew not long ago, but it was slow—dreadfully slow. It is shooting now."

"And what will it be to-morrow?" she asked, smiling.

"Not the least idea," answered Mr. Lovell; then he added in a lower tone, "do come out in the garden. I have so much to say to you."

But Silvia turned a deaf ear to this request. Of course he had a great deal to say to her, but Silvia had no wish to hear. She longed for him to be gone, and he was sitting so close by her, and she did not dare to stir; for though she purposely shunned looking down into the depths of her own heart, she was not so ignorant or so foolish as not to suspect that she was wronging Mr. Lovell. She guessed, but did not wish to know it, and shut her eyes not to see. She did her best, indeed, to forget, and her attempts were, some of them, startling enough even to Mr. Lovell.

"Is it true that you are very rich?" she asked.

Mr. Lovell's face darkened considerably at the question. He had never expected that his money would not weigh with the woman who would accept him for her husband, but he liked Silvia too well not to hate the thought that she was selling herself to him.

"Yes," he said sullenly, "I am very rich. "Why do you ask, Mademoiselle Nardi?"

"Because I feel dull," she replied impatiently, "and I wonder if you could not do something with your money to amuse me. You know, I am to have some too—twenty thousand pounds."

"Indeed!" he replied, with a slight raising of the eyebrows. "Well," he added, "I should be so glad if I could do anything to please you," and his face cleared considerably as he said it. "But there's no doing anything in this slow place. No," he added,

giving his whiskers a contemplative pull, "I don't think there is, on my honour."

"Then what is the good of your money?" asked Silvia with a toss of her brown head.

"Nay, nay," he argued, with the smile of a rich man, "money is a very good sort of thing, I can tell you. With money," he added, taking her hand, and gently raising it to his lips, unperceived, as he thought, by Lady John and Miss Gray, "I can cover these dear little fingers with rings; with money I can throw strings of pearls——"

What Mr. Lovell could do with money Silvia never learned. She drew her hand from his coldly, almost haughtily.

"Mr. Lovell," she said, "these are not Italian customs. You will please never to do that again."

She spoke low, too low for either of the ladies at the other end of the room to hear her, but she also spoke very deliberately. Mr. Lovell looked hard at her. His brow darkened, and with grave sullenness he said:

"Of course you mean this, Mademoiselle Nardi?"

"Every word of it."

"Well, I am too much of a gentleman to intrude on a lady, and especially a young lady, attentions which her education or her prejudices render unwelcome to her; but you must allow me to put one question to you: When you placed your hand in mine this morning, did you not mean that you were willing to become my wife?"

Silvia looked at him, and turned a little pale. If she had dared she would have said "No," but she did not dare. Mr. Lovell's handsome face was very cold

and grave, and Mr. Lovell's blue eyes were fastened on her with an expression that frightened and subdued her.

"Yes," she said with involuntary sincerity, "I meant that."

"Just so," said Mr. Lovell, still displeased and sulky, and still looking at her with that warning in his eyes which said so plainly that Silvia seemed to read every word of it: "Take care; I am Mr. Lovell—the rich Mr. Lovell. I have asked you to marry me, and you have said yes, and jilt me now if you dare—jilt me now if you dare, Mademoiselle Nardi!"

And Silvia felt that she might forbid Mr. Lovell to kiss her hand, and that he might obey her; but yet, for all that, she knew that she was in his power.

"Rather a stormy beginning, eh, Ada?" whispered Lady John, who had been furtively watching them.

"Mr. Lovell will like it all the better," replied Ada, not without a touch of bitterness in her tone.

And as life must go on spite lovemaking, jealousy, and even despair, the breakfast-bell rang and called them all away.

"I have forgotten my handkerchief," said Silvia, and she ran up to her room for a moment's breathing-time. She found Mrs. Groom there, with a telegram in her hand.

"Madame de l'Epine is coming after to-morrow, mamzelle," she said, "and we can go back to the château. There are rooms enough left for us, I believe."

"I shall stay here," replied Silvia; and she walked downstairs without giving Mrs. Groom a look.

CHAPTER XIV.

SOME melancholy thoughts Mrs. Green indulged in, as she heard the breakfast-bell, which rang in vain for her.

The flowers which Miss Meredith required did not grow in Lady John's garden, and no one knew it better than Mrs. Green. These flowers were to be gathered in the immediate vicinity of the château; but had they been Hesperian fruit, guarded by a cruel dragon, whose very slumbers were full of danger, Mrs. Green could not have felt more appalled than she did at the task laid upon her. Nature had made her pacific and timid. She could have lived like a snail in its shell, and drawn in her horns for ever, so far as anything like bold adventure was concerned. But fortune had forgotten to second nature. Fortune had placed her at her rich relative's mercy, and fiery and unscrupulous Miss Meredith had many a time thrust the poor lady into predicaments where of her own accord she would assuredly never have ventured. The snail indeed is not a very noble insect, it goes about creeping, but it never attacks, and it has the instinct of self-preservation. The contents of Miss Meredith's will were not such as to give Mrs. Green any particular affection for either Mr. Meredith or Miss Gray; it was not disagreeable to her to work either of them some sort of injury, even though they had not harmed her, and she did not actually dislike them; but to have to go and pry on Mr. Meredith's motions, to detect him in concealment and expose herself to his look of silent

contempt, appalled Mrs. Green's timid soul. Then how was she to do it? No more fitting pretence occurred to her than, if detected in her prying expedition, to declare that she came to see how the château looked after the fire. But when, wishing to avail herself of the postern door, Mrs. Green asked Parker for the key, she learned that Mrs. Groom had just taken it.

"How fortunate!" said Mrs. Green, looking charmed; but in her heart being in some awe of Mrs. Groom she thought, "how unfortunate!" She reached the postern door at the same time with the housekeeper.

"The very person I was seeking for," exclaimed Mrs. Green, with an uneasy attempt at gaiety and graciousness. "I want to look at the château, Mrs. Groom, and I shall be so glad if you will tell me all about that fire."

"There ain't much to tell, ma'am, and, to say truth, I ain't got no time to tell it. Madame de l'Epine is coming back, and I am to get a few rooms ready in a great hurry."

"Then I shall just walk by you, Mrs. Groom, till we get to the château, and look at it myself," said Mrs. Green.

"The breakfast-bell has just rang, ma'am," said Mrs. Groom drily.

"So it has," replied poor Mrs. Green, with a sigh, "but I don't happen to care for anything this morning."

"As if I were going to swallow that!" thought Mrs. Groom; but there was no help for it, and she walked on in austere silence, whilst Mrs. Green, nothing daunted, talked all the way.

"Mrs. Groom," she said with much mysteriousness

of manner, "you will not tell poor dear Miss Meredith that I came here, will you? You know her, Mrs. Groom, so warm-hearted and impulsive! It is quite delightful in a woman of her time of life, but then she will worry so about trifles, that it is quite distressing at times. Now, one of her keys—you know, Mrs. Groom, how particular she is about her keys, and what particular keys they are too—one of her keys has got astray. She does not know it yet, poor dear, but it terrifies me to think of the life she will lead me when she does. It frightens me, Mrs. Groom. When I remember all I went through about her pocket-book, which was all the time between the counterpane and the blanket of her bed, I may well be alarmed, I think."

"Do you want me to find that key, ma'am?" pointedly asked Mrs. Groom.

If she thus thought to disconcert her enemy, Mrs. Groom was thoroughly disappointed.

"If you could, I should so like it," complacently replied Mrs. Green; "more than I can say, Mrs. Groom."

Distance of rank is like the silken rope in tournaments, a very frail but very potent barrier. It now effectually checked the reply which rose to Mrs. Groom's lips. She had the most profound contempt for Mrs. Green, she thought a snail a poor creeping creature, she was Mrs. Green's superior in a hundred ways, and she knew it very well; but for all that she indulged herself in no severer retort than a cold,

"Not being in Lady John's house, I can't help you, ma'am?"

"Are you not coming back?" asked Mrs. Green

with well-feigned astonishment. "Ah! to be sure, Madame de l'Epine is coming. And when is Mr. Meredith coming, Mrs. Groom?"

"I wonder you don't see him standing there before you, ma'am," replied Mrs. Groom, with cool contempt. "This is the second time Mr. Meredith has been bowing to you."

Mrs. Green, thus cured of blindness, did see Mr. Meredith, who, though he had seen her before she perceived him, had either disdained to hide from her, or had felt no wish to do so.

He now came towards her, greeted her with his usual courtesy, and at once asked after Miss Meredith.

"Poor dear Miss Meredith has been quite unwell," replied Mrs. Green, hesitatingly. "And then I think this new thing has upset her a little."

"Do you mean the fire, Mrs. Green? Was she here when it took place?"

"Oh! no, not the fire. I mean Mademoiselle Nardi's engagement with Mr. Lovell. They are going to marry, you know."

She gave him a furtive look. They stood alone in the path, for Mrs. Groom had walked on.

Charles Meredith looked thunderstruck. His pale face grew white, and the light seemed to leave his deep gray eyes that took a vague look, but all he said was:

"Will you kindly ask Miss Meredith when I can see her, Mrs. Green?"

"Oh! certainly, perhaps I had better go back and ask her at once. She will be so glad to see you."

She turned back to the postern door, and Mr. Meredith let her go.

He did not thank her, he did not bid her good-

bye, or walk back with her along the path. He stood there as the blow had fallen upon him.

"And yet he will marry Ada Gray," thought Mrs. Green with a sigh, "and Miss Meredith will have her way to the last."

Miss Meredith was in a fever of impatience and irritation by the time Mrs. Green entered her room.

"Well?" she said shortly and sharply.

"Well, I saw Mr. Meredith. I met him a little unexpectedly, perhaps. He asked most kindly about you. Also he wants to know when he can see you. Do you know, dear Miss Meredith," she added, with a brisk sort of cheerfulness, "I should not at all wonder if this mystery had not been meant to surprise you. I should not wonder if dear Mr. Meredith had not meant to come in upon you quite unexpectedly. How nice of him!"

"Don't make me sick, Green!" exclaimed Miss Meredith, with a deeper and a sadder bitterness than she usually displayed to her companion. "You know you don't mean it, or believe it. You know the boy I have reared and spent a fortune on, is turning against me in my old age."

Mrs. Green murmured vaguely. It was sad, very sad; but still matters might be better than they seemed.

Miss Meredith shook her head impatiently, and with a motion of her hand, implying her weariness of further speech, she sank back in her chair, and leaning in it, with her chin on her breast, and her eyes moodily fastened on the thin withered hands which lay clasped on her lap, she gave way to some bitter and dreary thoughts.

"I am only fit to leave him money, am I?" she thought, "only fit to die and be buried, and leave him money, to pay off his rascally brother-in-law's cheating. And Ada Gray is in the plot, is she? It was all very well to blind me, and divide my money, and each go his and her own way, making believe to be so sweet together all the time, and he had little Nardi, and she was trying to hook that stupid Lovell; but I settled that for both of them, and I may settle the rest yet—I may settle it in a way they little think of, either of them."

Mrs. Green, who was watching her all the time, wondered on her part at Miss Meredith's long fit of musing. She wondered, but was not without guessing the nature of the sick lady's thoughts. Was Miss Meredith going to alter her will again? She had altered it several times already, as Mrs. Green had learned; by means which Miss Meredith might suspect, but had never yet detected. Ah! if she were to make it again as she had made it once before, leaving the bulk of the property to the charities, and ten thousand pounds to Mrs. Green. Ten thousand pounds; invest it at even no more than three per cent., it yielded three hundred a year. Add that to Mrs. Green's own hundred a year, and you get a sum total of four hundred. It was not much, but it was *el dorado* to the poor lady. A little house and garden in the newly-built part of Brompton, two servants, a subscription to Mudie's, a drive in the parks every now and then—Mrs. Green was indolent and did not care for too much exercise—a box at the Opera occasionally, would have filled Mrs. Green's heart with content; and all these were surely attainable for four hundred a year.

And then, though Mrs. Green did not add this commentary to her text, that yellow, dark-eyed tyrant, whom she was furtively watching, would be lying mute, deaf, blind and motionless in a strong oaken chest, six feet down in the earth, and never more would she or could she lay unpleasant errands on Mrs. Green, no more could she watch and torment and scold her. Suppose even that she did not leave her money to the charities, would ten thousand pounds be so great a loss to Ada Gray, who had such expectations, or to Charles Meredith, who made such a handsome living by his profession? It would be nothing, or next to nothing to them, and to her an inestimable blessing.

"I know what you are thinking of," here said Miss Meredith, startling Mrs. Green out of her reverie by this ominous remark; "but it won't do, Green, it won't do."

"My dear Miss Meredith!"

"I tell you it won't do, Green, it won't do; and now ring the bell for Symons—I think I'll dress."

Thus dismissed, Mrs. Green went down, and had her breakfast after everyone else had done. Scarcely had she gone through half the meal, when she was summoned up again. Miss Meredith sat by the window. The day had become clouded, and it was in a grey light, cold as the grave, that the poor unloved woman sat brooding over the treachery, as she called it, of her two chosen ones. Yes, they had combined to betray her. She had paid them out, indeed; she had snatched the rich man from that pale and cool Ada, and the bright Italian girl from rebellious Charles Meredith. But love troubles, which fade away from the mind of age, are not sufficiently keen or deep for its resent-

ment. Miss Meredith could contemplate but one adequate punishment for the ingrates, and that was still in her power. Yes, she could disinherit them, and add the bitterness of poverty to that other bitterness which, to say truth, Miss Meredith thought little enough of.

"May I come in?" then asked Mrs. Green, looking in at her through the half-open door.

That bitter retribution which surely overtakes the selfish and unloving was now beginning for Miss Meredith. For the first time she looked at poor Mrs. Green's round face with uneasiness. What if the patient victim of her tyranny should now turn tyrant in her turn, and having her at such advantage, deal with her as she listed. Charles Meredith had shunned her, and would only come on a sort of compulsion. Ada Gray she hated. Little Nardi did not care for her; and Lady John loved her own ease, and was not to be troubled or annoyed. There was no one left but Mrs. Green—no one, and she stared at the poor lady so moodily that Mrs. Green got uneasy.

"Are you not well, dear Miss Meredith?" asked Mrs. Green, whose uneasiness went on increasing.

"Come in," said Miss Meredith, turning her head away, and still thinking. "I must watch her—watch and bribe her."

There was something in the thought, weak and helpless as she felt, which soothed the sick woman.

"Mrs. Green," she said coaxingly, "sit down by me. Mrs. Green," she said, taking her hand, "I am going to turn over a new leaf, and we are going to get on beautifully—oh! so beautifully!" Poor Mrs. Green could scarcely believe her ears, so incredible sounded this language; but Miss Meredith went on,

"And I am going to alter my will back again. You remember how I made it once, Mrs. Green. I cut out the whole of them, and I gave all to the charities, with a legacy to you, Mrs. Green."

Mrs. Green murmured that she recollected something of the kind.

"And what became of that will, Mrs. Green?"

"You burned it, Miss Meredith."

"Did I? Well, I may burn another will, and disappoint them, Mrs. Green."

Mrs. Green was silent, but she felt her heart beating; for it is rare in life when the disappointment of some one does not mean the gratification of some one else, and that some one else just then might very well be Mrs. Green.

"Shall I read to you?" asked Mrs. Green; and she took up a book with great seeming alacrity. "Where did I leave off?"

Miss Meredith did not heed her.

"I gave him the education of a gentleman," she said bitterly; "I spent hundreds upon him, hundreds, and that is my reward!"

Mrs. Green sat patiently, with the open book in her hand, as if she were only waiting to begin. But Miss Meredith, without heeding her, rose—she had not been equal to the exertion for days—went for her desk, brought it, and opening it, began to write. Mrs. Green watched her over the pages of her book, and Miss Meredith, without heeding her, wrote on, till she had done, when, with a touch of her old sarcastic humour, she tossed the paper to her and said, "Read that."

Mrs. Green obeyed: the document she was thus commanded to peruse was brief, but most interesting.

It was, as Mrs. Green had surmised, Miss Meredith's will; and a very sweeping will it was, leaving all Miss Meredith might die possessed of to her faithful friend and relative, Arabella Meredith Green."

"My dear Miss Meredith!" cried Mrs. Green, raising her hands; "you are too good—I have not deserved this."

"Of course not; and you'll get it according as you behave yourself, Green. It's not signed."

"Of course not," cheerfully said Mrs. Green, as if to have the will signed would have filled her with dismay.

"The other one was signed and witnessed," bitterly said Miss Meredith; "but they have done for themselves, Green—they have."

"I am very sorry;" murmured Mrs. Green.

"Are you, Green?—you don't look like it. Your eyes sparkled awhile ago. Well, never mind—open that drawer, will you—the third, Green."

Mrs. Green did as she was bid.

"And now give me what you find there, will you?"

"I see a pair of gloves, Miss Meredith, and an opera-glass."

"Don't, Green, don't!" sighed the sick woman; "don't pretend that you do not see a sheet of blue foolscap; and give it to me."

Thus admonished, Mrs. Green was no longer blind to the will, which lay indeed very visible before her; and she brought it to Miss Meredith, who took it, and kept it in her hand, looking at it with a very sad and dreary look.

"Light the candle, Green, will you?" she said, in a low voice.

Mrs. Green obeyed in silence, and stood before Miss Meredith with the candle in her hand. Slowly but deliberately Miss Meredith raised the will to the flame, set fire to the thick blue paper, and held it fast till the flames nearly reached her fingers, when she handed it to Mrs. Green, who hastily threw it away in the fire-place. Miss Meredith waited till it was a blackened scroll, then she said with grim satisfaction,

"There goes a noble inheritance, Green. But do not be too sure of yourself, either," she added, suspiciously; "I am not dead yet, and it is just as you behave yourself, you know."

Miss Meredith was not dead yet, as she said, but she got much worse as the afternoon wore on, and the varieties in her mood were almost more than poor Mrs. Green could bear. Once she insisted on the windows being shut, and the curtains drawn, so that total darkness was the result. Another time she declared that if Mrs. Green did not leave the house, she should. Luckily this whim did not last more than five minutes, and was succeeded by another, which, though less dangerous to Mrs. Green's repose, was not much more acceptable to the poor lady. Miss Meredith asked for pen and ink.

"Is she going to write a fresh will?" thought Mrs. Green, with a sinking heart, for of course a fresh will must have been against her this time.

But no, Miss Meredith took out a sheet of note paper, scribbled a few lines, sealed and directed a letter, then rang the bell.

"Shall I post it for you?" asked Mrs. Green.

"No," was the short reply; "it is not to be posted."

"Then shall I take it?" persisted Mrs. Green, who could be obstinate at times.

"Don't worry me," replied Miss Meredith, with a wearied sigh; "that letter is for Charles Meredith, and a servant shall take it."

And a servant did take it. Mrs. Green saw it placed in his hands, she saw the door of the room close behind him, she heard his step going down, and she felt, with the resignation which repeated disappointments had taught her, that her fortunes were once more in great jeopardy.

"She has sent for him, he will come, and, of course, they will make it up again," thought Mrs. Green, with a sigh.

Miss Meredith's face confirmed her fears. Miss Meredith looked sad and despondent. Miss Meredith looked in the mood in which Queen Elizabeth longed to forgive her young Essex; and as there was no treacherous Countess of Nottingham to come between them, could Mrs. Green doubt that the sick lady would forgive her favourite once more? She loved him, even though she had made it impossible for him to live with her; and love is a potent enchanter, and has many spells wherewith to break stubborn pride.

"You want to know what I have written?" suddenly said Miss Meredith, looking hard at her. "I don't mind telling you, Green. I have forbidden him to come near me till I send for him."

Mrs. Green muttered something, which sounded like an intercession.

"Don't, Green," said Miss Meredith, not without a sort of pathos in her voice—"don't try that!"

CHAPTER XV.

SILVIA stood in her room, with her back to the door, when she heard a tap behind her.

"Come in," she said, without looking round.

"Please, mamzelle, I bring a message from Madame de l'Epine," said Mrs. Groom's voice.

At once Silvia turned round, and Mrs. Groom could see that she held a sparkling necklace in her hand.

"How is she?" composedly asked Silvia—"well, I hope. And how is the Captain, Mrs. Groom—better?"

"The Captain will never be better, mamzelle, nor my poor dear mistress either, I fear. But Madame de l'Epine wished me to give you this."

Silvia took the letter which Mrs. Groom handed her, and read it attentively.

"Silvia," wrote her friend, "you are angry with me, but I had cares and sorrows which no one could share, for there was shame in them. I also thought you would have faith in me, and so I left you. You have shown me my error, and punished me for it so severely, that my whole life long I shall feel the sting of that pain. But it is too late to complain—too late to repent. I only wish to ask you if the step you have taken is irrevocable indeed. If it is, I must write to your guardian; if it is not, come back to me at once, and let all be forgotten."

Silvia put this letter in her pocket with a haughty smile.

"Madame de l'Epine is very kind to want me back," she said, with a touch of irony; "but, you see, Mrs. Groom, she is still in so much trouble, that I think I had better stay here, where she left me. For perhaps you do not know it, but I am going to marry Mr. Lovell."

She looked Mrs. Groom very proudly in the face as she said it. Mrs. Groom was evidently much surprised.

"Indeed, mamzelle!" she said.

"Yes, Mrs. Groom, and see what Mr. Lovell telegraphed to Paris for." She flashed a beautiful diamond ring before Mrs. Groom's eyes. "And look again," she added, opening a richly-bound album, filled with exquisite water-colour views of Rome and its environs—"that is my country, Mrs. Groom, and Mr. Lovell is to take me there."

"When you are married, I suppose?"

Silvia nodded, and in the pride and fulness of her heart she said:

"Is is not like a fairy-tale?"

"Why, so it is, in some respects," calmly replied Mrs. Groom. "You will be a very rich lady, no doubt. And that Mr. Lovell dotes on you, I saw long ago."

"Yes," saucily interrupted Silvia, "I believe he likes me."

"I daresay Madame de l'Epine will be disappointed and sorry," continued Mrs. Groom.

"Disappointed! Why so?" again interrupted Silvia.

"I believe you can guess why, mamzelle," replied Mrs. Groom, very composedly; "but I daresay 'tis best so. Not because the one ain't as rich, nor yet as good

as the other, but because I always thought Mr. Meredith was the sort of man who ought to marry an angel, and I for one should hate being made an angel of before my time!"

Silvia smiled ironically.

"An angel! Think how inconvenient the wings would be, Mrs. Groom!"

"So they would, mamzelle, and I suppose that's why they keep flying up there, and don't come down to us; but, as I said, he should have married an angel, and even then I ain't sure that she would have been perfect enough for him," pensively added Mrs. Groom.

"Is Miss Gray an angel?" asked Silvia.

"She's like one; but I don't know how they'll get on together, that's the truth. Pretty well, I daresay. She's the very one to manage a man, that she is."

Silvia bit her lip, and it was with a heightened colour that she said:

"You have not seen all, Mrs. Groom—look!" and opening a casket she displayed such an amount of jewels within it, that Mrs. Groom stared.

"You don't mean to say that you are going to wear all that?"

"I was to choose," said Silvia, "for I am to have the family diamonds as well, but I think I'll keep all."

"My dear mamzelle, Mr. Lovell is not so rich as all that. He never can afford it."

"Then he shall take them all back—everyone!" cried Silvia, in sudden and vehement displeasure. "I will not be tantalized. If I keep the emeralds I shall always regret the rubies, and if I cannot have the cameos I shall go distracted. Look at them, Mrs. Groom," she added, with a sudden softness in her voice, "you can-

not tell me to give them up! All *pietre dure*, the muses for a necklace, and the three graces in a bracelet. And the tiara," she added, placing the graceful diadem on her young brown head, "and the ear-rings," she said, fastening them on, "all set in Etruscan style! No, I cannot let them go, Mrs. Groom. Besides, they come from Rome, you know."

She looked at herself in the glass, and smiled at her own young image.

"They're pretty," said Mrs. Groom approvingly.

"Pretty! Mrs. Groom, they are beautiful! Look at this head. Why, these parted lips seem to speak."

"That head is like you, mamzelle."

Silvia blushed and smiled.

"So Mr. Lovell says. Yes, I must keep the cameos. Perhaps I shall give up the emeralds."

But when the emeralds lay before her on their bed of white satin, when she saw them so softly shining like green leaves, with fruit of delicious pink coral, Silvia's heart relented. No, she could not give them up. After that she turned to the rubies. Soft, red, and set round with brilliants and pearls, sparkled the rich gems, fewer in number than in the cameo or emerald sets, but far richer in lustre, and of a more gorgeous beauty. Silvia looked at them long and silently; then, putting them back in the casket, she went down to the drawing-room with it in her hand. Mr. Lovell was below. Lady John and Ada Gray alone were present.

"Well," gaily said Mr. Lovell, taking the casket from Silvia's hand, "which have you chosen, fair lady?" He opened the casket, and exclaimed, on seeing its contents: "Why, they are all here!"

"Yes," carelessly replied Silvia, "I like them all equally well."

There was an awkward pause.

"Shall I choose for you?" asked Mr. Lovell, putting his hand on the rubies, the most costly though perhaps not the most beautiful of the three sets.

"No, thank you," sweetly replied Silvia, turning her head away. "Whichever you choose will only make me regret the other two."

Mr. Lovell turned very red, and looked much embarrassed. To give the three was indeed beyond his means. Mr. Lovell was rich, but his wealth was neither fabulous nor boundless, and he had had losses.

"Well, then, take two," he said with some hesitation.

Silvia laughed gaily and saucily in his face.

"And if I do," she said, "the third will be the very one I wanted."

"My dear Mademoiselle Nardi——"

"My dear Mr. Lovell, shut up the casket—take it away and let us say no more about it. You don't think," she added, looking full in his face with her bright clear look, "that I am marrying you for your money or your jewels?"

Mr. Lovell looked at her and felt bewitched. Several times already Silvia had put to him the same proud, defiant question, and ever with the same proud clear look that carried conviction to Mr. Lovell. No, this girl was not marrying him for his money. Yielding to an irresistible impulse, a fond foolish madness, he placed the casket in her little hands and closed them upon it. Silvia had ceased to hope this; surprise and delight at first kept her mute; then she burst forth into a joyous transport.

"Oh! how good, how very good you are to me!" she cried, with a dewy softness in her eyes as their look fell upon him. "But pray don't spoil me so any more—pray do not!"

Mr. Lovell laughed, and whispered in her ear—

"My darling, you must never tempt me so again, for I could not help doing what I have done, and *entre nous* a few more such whims would ruin me."

A bright triumphant meaning flitted across Silvia's face. It is sweet to prevail, it is sweet to possess jewels both beautiful and splendid, so generously given, and even in the meekest of womankind the presence of a rival and of a cold friend does not detract from either joy or sweetness. Still, there was no littleness, no unkind triumph in Silvia's heart as she turned to Ada Gray and Lady John, and said, with the casket in her hands—

"Was there ever anything like it? I am ashamed, indeed I am, and yet," she frankly added, "I am glad. Look!"

She took out the cameos and put them on, diadem, bracelet, necklace and earrings, then walked towards Lady John, who raised her eyeglass critically, whilst Ada leaned back in her chair with a faint sigh.

But if the Gorgon head which wreathed its serpents in the shield of Athené had suddenly flashed before Silvia's eyes she could not have stood still more suddenly, with face more rigid and eyes more startled, than when, on approaching Lady John, she saw Mr. Meredith sitting in one of the deep windows, with his pale face looking at her from the deep folds of the crimson damask curtains. There was sorrow in his look, there was coldness and pride, and, above all that,

there was a quiet scorn; but none of these tokens did Silvia read or feel or heed, she only knew that he was there before her, and after staring at him for a moment in dreary wonder, she turned away and sank on the nearest chair.

"I believe Miss Meredith's quarter of an hour is over now," said Mr. Meredith rising, "and that I may venture to go up and see her."

"Then I shall go with you," said Lady John, with suspicious alacrity.

Mr. Meredith raised no demur; he went up to Silvia, made a polite inquiry, which she did not answer; then, without heeding her silence, bowed courteously and left the room.

Silvia began to rally now. She started to her feet; she turned crimson; her eyes flashed fire, and confronting Mr. Lovell, she said angrily—

"Why did you not tell me Mr. Meredith was there?"

Mr. Lovell did not answer. Her emotion had not passed unnoticed by him, and it had brought to his handsome face a cloud of sulky and jealous displeasure, which her angry and imperative question did not dispel.

"You knew it," she said vehemently—"you all knew it!" Here her eye fell angrily on Ada Gray, who quietly rose and walked out of the room, and closed the door behind her.

"Of course we did," replied Mr. Lovell very coldly.

"Then why did you not tell me?—why did he not speak to me?"

"Really, Mademoiselle Nardi, you must put the question to Mr. Meredith yourself."

"It is a plot!" indignantly cried Silvia, snatching the cameos from her head, her neck, her arm, and tossing them on the table—"it is a plot to insult me."

Mr. Lovell looked at her with increasing displeasure and mistrust.

"Will you be good enough to explain yourself?" he asked in tones of ice.

His voice, his look, sobered Silvia. She trembled from head to foot, and all colour left her cheeks.

"I mean," she said in faltering accents, "that I consider it strange in you to let me put on these jewels in Mr. Meredith's presence, and impertinent in him not to come forth and address me."

"I was not aware that trying on jewels given by me should not be done in Mr. Meredith's presence," replied Mr. Lovell, looking black as night. "As to his not addressing you, perhaps, Mademoiselle Nardi, it was because you had not been two minutes in the room. Unless, indeed, he had other motives with which I am unacquainted."

"May I ask your meaning?" inquired Silvia, looking pale and indignant.

"May I ask yours?" replied Mr. Lovell very warmly—"may I ask who and what Mr. Meredith is to you, that you should display all this emotion when he appears?"

The very lips of Silvia grew white, but she answered very calmly:

"Mr. Meredith is nothing and no one to me, Mr. Lovell—and never has been," she added, looking him full in the face. "I suppose," she continued, in the tone of an injured queen, "that you will do me the

honour to believe me—at least,” she added with emphatic bitterness, “I hope so.”

There is always a culminating point in a quarrel, whether between lovers or friends, or even enemies. It is when one of the belligerent parties begins to give way. Mr. Lovell now found himself in that unfortunate position. In reality he was in the right. In reality his resentment of Silvia's unreasonable reproaches was justified, but by laying bare his mode of attack to the enemy, he gave her a sudden advantage, which the extremity of her peril made her seize at once. It is dangerous to say the truth, unless one be prepared to say it all. It is dangerous not to be able to follow up a bold attack, and to have to effect a defensive retreat. In that predicament Mr. Lovell now found himself. Silvia looked at his flushed and confused face, and smiled very calmly. Picking up the cameos, she quietly put them back into the casket, and placing this in his hands, she said, with some dignity:

“Keep this for me, Mr. Lovell. Whilst it is in your care, I shall not feel at least that your generosity must keep my tongue silent. You know me now as I am, if you did not know me before—a wilful, passionate girl, accustomed to say what comes uppermost, and yet also accustomed not to be misinterpreted.”

“I can't stand that,” replied Mr. Lovell, pulling his whiskers, and pushing the casket angrily away. “I can't, Mademoiselle Nardi; and, by Jove! I have not deserved it from you.”

“Of course you have not,” replied Silvia, with her most witching smile—“who says you have? But you must obey me—now is my time, and I will be obeyed,” she added wilfully.

He looked at her, angry, jealous, irresolute, and yet conquered, spite jealousy and anger. He let her place the casket in his hands, and using his own motion, close them upon it with pretty despotism.

"Keep it for me," she said, "it is mine. You must not touch one of the jewels in it, but you must keep it."

"Why so?" he asked very reluctantly.

He leaned back on the couch, and held the costly casket carelessly and loosely enough as he looked up at her; and she stood before him graceful, pretty, and wilful.

"Why so?" she repeated gaily. "Why, that I may torment you to my heart's content, Mr. Lovell."

"That you will be sure to do," he ruefully replied.

Silvia turned her head away, and gave him her hand; and as Mr. Lovell kissed it, spite the old prohibition, Silvia, looking at herself in the mirror opposite, thought with a bursting heart, "I wish I were dead!—I wish I were dead!"

"Yes, I wish I were dead!" thought Silvia, as, after leaving Mr. Lovell, she went up to her room and threw herself on her bed. "I wish I were dead and buried, away from all this!" What ailed her? She did not know, or, rather, she did not wish to know it. But do what she would to drive it away, Mr. Meredith's pale face was ever coming back before her, such as it looked when he saw her decked with Mr. Lovell's gifts—a pale face, grave and sad, but also with a quiet scorn, which, though subdued, seemed intolerable to Silvia's memory. She shut her eyes, not to see it, and it was there, passing before that mental vision which is the torment

of a troubled heart. The sound of a hurried knock at the door roused her. A languid "Come in" authorized Mrs. Green's entrance.

"My dear," she said, without preamble, "Miss Meredith would like to speak to you."

Silvia raised her head from her pillow, then let it sink back again.

"What for?" she asked.

"She did not say."

Silvia sat up. "He must be gone," she thought. She smoothed her hair, she slipped down on the floor, and walking unsteadily, like one still giddy, she left her room. She went along the corridors, and up and down the staircases, passing by closed doors, and wondering if every one within felt as bitter and desolate as she felt just then, looking at the bright gleams of yellow sunlight which shone across the polished steps, or fell down in purple and violet hues from the painted glass windows Lady John delighted in, thinking languidly, "All this seemed so beautiful and so bright an hour ago, and now it is so dark, so dull and so dark!"

On reaching the door of Miss Meredith's room, Silvia stood still and listened, with a little frown on her clear white forehead. Was that talking within? No, everything was silent. Yet she opened gently—so gently and so noiselessly, that she was not heard, and could pause on the threshold, looking breathlessly at Mr. Meredith, who did not see her. She looked, standing there motionless, with her hand on the door, and forgetting that she had meant to avoid him. He stood leaning back with folded arms against a cabinet, and facing Miss Meredith. She sat up in her deep

arm-chair. The setting sun, which streamed in through the open window, fell with a fiery glow across the sick woman's pale face. Involuntarily Silvia thought of an old Breton legend, which Mr. Meredith had once told her, and in which the adventurer, in quest of hidden treasure, finds a yellow woman, clad in black, waiting for him in the remote chamber of a palace, and who, when questioned, answers, "I was born with Sin in Paradise, and my name is Death." And the fearless adventurer goes on his quest undeterred. Thus cool, thus undaunted, looked Mr. Meredith. With hesitating steps, Silvia walked in, and appeared before the pair.

"There!" triumphantly cried Miss Meredith, stretching her hand towards Silvia; "there, deny it now if you dare!"

Mr. Meredith gave Silvia a cool and quiet look.

"Mademoiselle Nardi is not likely to assert anything either Miss Gray or I am likely to deny," he said.

Silvia started slightly as he uttered the words, for she then first saw Ada Gray sitting by the open window, and looking out on the evening sky, all flushed with sunset, and the village in the shady valley below making a background of deep green, against which the white vases on Lady John's terrace rose bright and golden. To all seeming, Ada was absorbed in the prospect. In the warm and tender evening light her beautiful calm face looked like lovely ivory, to which some cunning artist had given life, indeed, but which still preserved the repose of its first existence. Silvia's blood seemed to flow like fire in her veins as she looked at her rival; but she so far commanded herself as to say calmly, addressing Miss Meredith,

"May I know what you want of me?"

"Did you or did you not see him and Ada Gray on Wednesday morning?" asked Miss Meredith, turning on her, and speaking with fiery vehemence.

Before Silvia could reply, Mr. Meredith interfered.

"And is that the question to answer which Mademoiselle Nardi was troubled to come here?" he exclaimed, looking much displeased. "Is that what you want to know, Miss Meredith?"

"You can't deny it!—you can't deny it!" she said, triumphantly. "She saw you both hiding!—she saw you!"

Silvia, turning crimson, was again going to speak, but again Mr. Meredith did not give her time to do so.

"It is quite possible that Mademoiselle Nardi should have seen us," he said, very calmly, "for Miss Gray and I certainly met, and had a long conversation on Wednesday morning; but what of that, Miss Meredith?"

"Why did you not tell me you had seen him when I asked you to get me his address?" asked Miss Meredith, turning towards Ada. "Why did you not tell me?"

Ada slowly turned her gaze from the prospect on which it had been riveted, and was going to speak; but Mr. Meredith, who seemed determined to bear the brunt of his cousin's anger, took on himself to answer this question.

"Miss Gray could scarcely tell you, in honour, that which I had requested her especially to keep secret."

Miss Meredith stared at him in more wonder than anger, or, at least, in wonder on which anger slowly followed.

"So you meant it!" she said, at last. "You meant it, Charles; and it has come to this between us, that you avoid me—you avoid me!"

"Excuse me, I wanted to see you, that same day, but you refused to see me."

"You asked to see me, of course you did—when all was over! Shall I tell you why you did not ask it earlier?" she cried, passionately, and losing all self-control in the vehemence of her anger. "Shall I tell you why? You stayed away because your brother-in-law is a cheat and forger, and that you will barter your property to save him, thinking yourself sure all the time of mine. But you may be mistaken, Mr. Meredith; no inheritance of mine shall save that fellow from dishonour—none, none!" she cried, striking her hand on the elbow of her chair with angry force.

Mr. Meredith smiled in her face.

"Now you set me free," he said. "I owe you much, all my life I shall remember it, and hold dear the memory of the woman who cared for my childhood—but still you set me free!"

"Charles! Charles!" cried Miss Meredith, with sudden love and tenderness in her dark eyes, "if you were a boy again, you would be mine, as you once were, as you should ever have been," she added, with keen reproach.

He smiled again.

"Manhood has its claims," he said, "and much though I owed you, I could not—I will be honest—I would not deny them."

"No, you would not," she cried, with sudden irritation, and her dark eyes flashing angrily. "You were always stubborn, even though you never lost your temper, never, but always smiled in my face, because you did not care about me, Charles. Did you care when you were told that I was ill? You did not!—you did not!"

"Do not say so," he said, very gently, and sitting down by her side as he spoke. "Ever since my return I have sent to know three times a day how you were, whether better or worse."

"Did you?" she said, slowly. She looked at him, then at Ada Gray; then she remarked, with calm bitterness, "Yes, yes, of course you did. It is worth while knowing how people are when they have something to leave, Charles!"

Mr. Meredith's pale face became flushed; but he looked as if he scorned to reply. It may be that his silence only exasperated Miss Meredith, for she said, with increasing bitterness,

"What is a will when people are agreed? And," she added, looking from Charles Meredith to Ada Gray, "it is so easy to put it by when the poor fool is dead and gone."

Mr. Meredith rose.

"Miss Gray must plead her own cause," he said coldly; "but if I were as mercenary as you think me, Miss Meredith, I would never have left you—I, a poor man; you, a rich woman. I would never act as I do in opposition to your wishes; I would never risk the inheritance you taught me to call mine, to save what can be saved of a mean wretch's honour."

"It is pride—it is all pride!" she cried—"the pride

that made you rebel against me as a boy, Charles; the pride that made you go from me as a man will make a beggar of you now. As you sow, so will you reap. And do not think that *you* shall reap the benefit of your treachery," she added, turning to Ada Gray. "You might both have been rich—thank yourselves if you both are poor."

"Miss Gray is innocent," replied Charles. "I wanted to see Mr. Lovell at once in private, and I asked her to be my messenger. Surely that is not guilt."

"Very well, sir—very well," said Miss Meredith, speaking low, and evidently trying to curb in her resentment. "I know what to think, and I shall know how to act."

Silvia could not bear this. She had not merely wrought her own undoing—she had ruined Mr. Meredith. She went up to him, and looking at him, she said, piteously—

"Pray forgive me—pray do! I did not know what I was doing. I meant no harm—tell Joséphine that I did not, and pray forgive me!"

If she had been a statue, Mr. Meredith could not have looked at her more coldly than he did.

"I have nothing to forgive," he said. "I had trusted you with no secret, and therefore you betrayed none. Besides, Mr. Lovell has suffered too cruelly from my poor sister's husband for me to resent anything you can do, Mademoiselle Nardi."

Silvia turned very pale, and drew back two steps. So that was her claim on Mr. Meredith. She was Mr. Lovell's future wife. That character saved her from his resentment, and ensured her impunity. She could

not utter one word more, but stood before them all an image of silent despair, and reckless of the meaning they could put on her grief. Mr. Meredith looked at her, and his pale face became deeply flushed as he looked. He knew whence that despair sprang, and he also knew that though a word of his could cure this passionate sorrow, that word was more than he dare utter. She was Mr. Lovell's now, and Mr. Lovell was the man whom his sister's husband had robbed—whom his stepfather had helped to deceive.

"I could steal her from him," thought Charles Meredith—"oh! how easily! I have but to stretch out my hand and take her, and I cannot—I must not! No, I must not be so dishonourable and so base as to attempt it."

But widely different, indeed, are the thoughts of age and youth. Whilst these bitter reflections went through the young man's mind, his cousin was brooding over her wrongs. Her head was bent on her chest, her eyes were downcast. Suddenly raising them, she said,

"You may all go now—I do not want you."

Silvia looked at her with dim eyes and quivering lips.

"You have been my ruin!" she said. "God forgive you—I cannot!"

She passed by them all, opened and closed the door, and vanished, and with her seemed to go the brightness of Charles Meredith's life. He looked at Miss Gray; she rose, and bowing to Miss Meredith, they, too, were going to leave the room, when by the word "Stop!" she arrested them on the threshold.

"Charles," she said, "you can choose still. Give

up all share in that base fellow's concerns, and—and I will forgive you."

"I cannot——"

"Say you will not," she interrupted.

"I cannot break my word, deliberately pledged to Mr. Lovell," replied Charles Meredith.

"Then go and remember that you have chosen."

They went, and Mrs. Green alone remained behind with Miss Meredith.

"Ada," said Mr. Meredith, "she will never forgive me. I am as sure of it as that I am here. Make your peace with her, and do not consider me."

"Miss Meredith never liked me," replied Miss Gray quietly; "I daresay she will now turn to Mrs. Green. Good-bye, Charlie. Do not trouble about me."

She gave him her hand, and looked with proud calmness in his face. He knew what ailed her, and how and why she suffered, and he also knew that he must attempt no consolation. Miss Gray went to her own room.

She had to write letters, she said.

Mr. Meredith entered the drawing-room, and only found Mrs. Barton there. Mrs. Barton informed him that Lady John and Professor Smith had gone out for a walk, and that Mr. Lovell was practising. Practising is an extensive word, yet Mr. Meredith seemed to understand its meaning in Mr. Lovell's case, for he only asked where that gentleman's practice lay. Mrs. Barton told him, and as Lady John's possessions were familiar to the young man, he soon made his way to the scene of Mr. Lovell's practice. His thoughts were bitter enough as he crossed the garden to go to the dark alley in which Mr. Lovell's target had been erected. Life which

had smiled on Charles Meredith for so many years, was clouded now and very dark. The Captain's mind had given way beneath the weight of his troubles; his sister was struck to the very heart, and he was clear-sighted enough to see it. The inheritance which he had been taught to count upon as his was now forfeited; disgrace, which no sacrifice could avert, hung over a name of which the honour was dear to him; and, to crown all, a girl whom he loved, and who loved him, was lost beyond recall. No, never, and he felt it, could he make one effort to take the future wife of the man whom his own brother-in-law had basely robbed. He must submit and look on; nay, hardest of his many trials, he was now seeking in some sort as a suppliant the man whom of all men he would have shunned most willingly.

In this mood Mr. Meredith reached the spot where Mr. Lovell was practising. He came upon him just as a successful shot crowned his efforts.

"I suppose that's done for," thought Mr. Lovell, wondering what would come next; for he had already found that Mademoiselle Nardi was something more than a pleasant means of spending time.

As if to answer the question, Charles Meredith suddenly appeared before him, pale and grave, and Mr. Lovell looking at him with the pistol in his hand, unconsciously allowed his handsome face to become sulky and dark as he looked.

"I have no wish to detain you long, Mr. Lovell," said Mr. Meredith, "I only want to know when this matter can be finally settled between us, so that I need trouble you no more."

"This day week, if you please."

Mr. Meredith looked surprised at the delay; but Mr. Lovell did not choose to tell him that he was going to Paris for a few days. So Charles Meredith bowed, and acquiescing in Mr. Lovell's pleasure, said:

"This day week let it be," and went his way.

Gaunt and blackened rose the ruins of the château before Charles Meredith, as he approached it by the high road, and dreary enough by daylight looked this spectre of the home in which he had once spent days so bright. The old mansion, however, had suffered less in reality than in appearance. Workmen had already done much towards rendering it secure, and many of its rooms were quite habitable.

In an apartment as remote from rude and harsh sounds as could be found for him, sat the Captain, brooding over the treachery that clouded his old age with disgrace and grief. The room was darkened and silent, and his pale daughter sat by him, holding his hand in her own, sad, resigned, and quiet.

"Well?" said Charles, as he entered the room.

"Well," she answered, "there is no change. He shakes his head, and will not answer."

Mr. Meredith looked at his stepfather, he looked at his sister, he thought of Silvia, and remembering his own wrongs, he could scarcely keep in the bitter words which rose to his lips. Why had that scheming, dishonourable man such power to blast whatever came near him? Why was every one who came within his reach to be his victim? But bitter though was his own sorrow, keen though was his sense of his sister's grief, it was perhaps that old man's silent and pathetic trouble which filled him with the deepest resentment. He was a man young and energetic, he could endure

his fate; his sister was pious and resigned, she could cast her hope on heaven and find comfort there; but the poor Captain had been more of earth, and to earth he was cast when his imprudent faith was betrayed. Charles went and sat by him.

"I have seen Mr. Lovell again," he said.

The Captain raised his blue eyes—how heavy was their look!—then his head sank once more upon his breast.

"It is all right," cheerfully continued Charles. "The money is to be refunded, and Mr. Lovell is satisfied."

The Captain shook his head impatiently, and muttered to himself:

"A villain! a thief!—a dishonourable villain!"

"He deserved no mercy, yet he has got it," persisted Charles. "For your sake and Joséphine's his name shall not be uttered."

The Captain looked up. An angry light shone in his eyes, his face was flushed.

"What will he do next?" he asked, and his lip quivered with indignation as he put the question.

"Nothing," coldly answered Mr. Meredith. "He is not so mad as to expect to be saved twice."

"He will do it again," said the Captain, shaking with impotent wrath; "but, as you say, though he may find fools to practice upon, he will not find them ready to screen him, and he will be disgraced, and end his days at Cayenne."

Mr. Meredith bit his lip. He could not answer this. So he rose and left the Captain's side, and the old man fell back into his dreary dream.

Joséphine went up to her brother, and laying her

hand on his arm, she looked up wistfully in his face. He read that look very well, for he answered it with a smile.

"I saw her," he said. "She was trying on some very handsome jewels which Mr. Lovell has given her."

"Opposite you, Charles?"

"Oh! she did not see me."

His sister looked at him again, but the calm smile of his eyes seemed to defy sorrow and pain.

She took a few turns up and down the room, then came back to him.

"I must see her," she said.

"What for?" he asked. "Not to bid her leave Mr. Lovell for me, Joséphine?—I would not have her. Then what for? Unless, perhaps, to tell her that her home is still here; but she will not come."

"No," sadly replied his sister, "she will not. And Miss Meredith, Charles," she resumed, "what of her? Why would she not see you before to-day?"

"Oh! it was a sick woman's fancy," he replied, so carelessly, that she never suspected how dear her husband's crime was to cost her brother.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT length, and to her great satisfaction, Miss Georgie Lovell had been allowed to leave her room. She found it "quite jolly," as she graphically expressed it, to get down again; but she was not equally charmed with the state of Lady John's household.

"It's awful, that's what it is," thought Miss Lovell,

puckering up her eyebrows; and she went forth into the bright garden, seeking into what sympathetic ear she could pour her sense of this awfulness. She found none save Silvia's.

Mademoiselle Nardi was standing alone by the little fountain, looking at its falling waters with a serious, absorbed look, and not seeming to heed the hot sun which was pouring full on her bare head.

"I say, it's awful, isn't it?" ejaculated Miss Lovell.

Silvia turned slowly round, and looked at her with still greater seriousness in her black eyes.

"What is awful?" she asked.

"Why, everything," impetuously replied Miss Lovell.

"Professor Smith to begin with. Don't you call the way he goes on at times quite awful?"

"I don't listen."

"Well, but you hear, don't you? And then Gerald being gone *I* call awful," she added, with a resentful emphasis on the personal pronoun *I*.

"Mr. Lovell will come back."

"Ah! but when?"

"I do not know—I did not ask," replied Silvia, and she slowly walked away.

"I don't believe she cares a pin about him!" angrily thought Miss Lovell. "Now, I don't like Ada; but at least *she* liked him."

The event had fully justified the prediction made by Miss Gray concerning Mr. Lovell's courtship. The first chapter in the tale of his wooing had been a stormy one, and he had liked it all the better because it was so. Ada, who saw how surely the net enclosed him, also felt that she could never have thrown such a spell upon him. Silvia was wilful, impatient, and

capricious, and Mr. Lovell bore with it all, ever keeping the mental proviso that this fanciful young creature would in the end become Mrs. Lovell. In reality his end of the chain sat lightly upon him. It was of his own choosing, to begin with; then these pretty caprices roused and amused him. So everything went on for the best, till Charles Meredith's appearance on the scene. Then Mr. Lovell got jealous, and jealousy was something more than he had bargained for. Still, his jealousy not being expressed, led to no actual outbreak between these two; but both felt it, and to both it brought a sense of trouble and pain. Mr. Lovell, indeed, was quite determined to hold good his own; he was not, and did not think himself a man to be jilted; and, to do her justice, wilful, vehement, and impulsive though she was, Silvia was not the girl to take up a man's love one day and drop it the next. Pride as a woman, and that honour which, if it does not always come down with ancient descent, is at least one of its noblest boasts, alike forbade conduct so treacherous and so shameful. From the moment that her lips had ratified the rash promise into which jealousy had betrayed her, she had resolved to abide by it. "I will never break my word," she thought, with a swelling heart. "I have passed it, and I will abide by it."

But if Mr. Lovell bore lightly enough his end of the chain, as we have already said, the other end weighed heavily on his future wife. A sort of liking for him she felt; he was pleasing to her in a certain way, and she knew, with a woman's fine instinct, that he was honourable and good; but her bonds were irksome to her, and every link was painful. The clear,

sparkling diamond ring which Mr. Lovell had given her as a pledge of their engagement, had charmed her three hours, but after this she found that it hurt her, and she took it off whenever she entered her room. The album with the Roman views had delighted her at first. She could have looked for ever at the Colosseum, with the red sunset deepening the rich hues of its walls baked by centuries, and the blue Roman sky enclosing it; but when Mr. Lovell, as was natural, would look over these views with her, the charm fled from the pages, till they seemed as colourless as if some evil fairy had breathed upon them. And yet all this had to be borne—ay, even after Charles Meredith saw her trying on the jewels, even after she met him in Miss Meredith's room. It had to be borne; but Silvia, who had chafed at her bondage, found it a relief when Mr. Lovell went away, and was perhaps too careless to hide it.

“Why, that's the most awful of it all,” resentfully thought Miss Lovell, brooding over these unfavourable symptoms? “What does she want?”

And not being given to conceal her impressions, she imparted the unpleasant conclusions she had arrived at to Mrs. Barton, who now came sauntering her way. Even this amiable optimist had been struck with the fact that Mademoiselle Nardi did not seem to dote on Mr. Lovell, and she now said as much, though with many a prudent circumlocution.

“I have a mind to give her a good shaking,” angrily said Miss Lovell. “What business has she to marry *my* cousin if she does not care more than that for him.”

“My dear, consider!—he likes her!”

Miss Lovell puckered up her eyebrows, and pursed her lips as she said:

"That's beyond *me*, Mrs. Barton; but then men are such muffs!"

"Oh! but Mr. Lovell is so delightfully clever!" argued Mrs. Barton.

"They're all muffs," energetically retorted Miss Lovell, "or bores the whole of them, Mrs. Barton."

"Not Mr. Barton, my dear!"

Miss Lovell longed to say "Mr. Barton too," but had manners enough to refrain; so she made up for it by returning to her original cause of complaint, and declaring:

"All I have to say is this: if I had known how awful Lady John's house was, I'd have stayed up in my room."

"Awful, my love?"

"Yes, awful! Mrs. Barton! What business has Gerald to go to Paris, just when I come downstairs again? And why is she so cool about it? And why is Miss Meredith ill, if it isn't all awful!"

Mrs. Barton looked convinced by Miss Lovell's irresistible logic.

"Well, there is something extraordinary about Lady John's house just now," she confessed, "or else poor dear Miss Meredith would never be so cranky as it seems she is. Mrs. Green must not leave her night or day. My goodness, here she is! Is Miss Meredith dead?"

In her surprise Miss Barton actually put the question.

"No, thank heaven!" replied Mrs. Green with a sigh, which probably was a sigh of thankfulness; "but

dear Miss Meredith, having taken an opiate, I came down to have a little fresh air."

"Poor dear! you do look knocked up," compassionately said Mrs. Barton, "and how is dear Miss Meredith going through her opiate?"

"She is sleeping."

"Is she?" was the admiring reply; "poor dear lady! well, you will be glad when she is well again."

Unaffectedly did Mrs. Green assent. She was in reality so worn out that even the splendid prospects held out by Miss Meredith's will had lost their attractions in the sufferings by which they were purchased. The present pain was more than the future good.

"And so she has taken an opiate?" continued Mrs. Barton. "I suppose Doctor Landais ordered it. I think Doctor Landais a remarkable man. Don't you? An opiate! how odd, though! Would you have ordered an opiate, Mrs. Green?"

"Yes, I really should," answered the poor lady; "it is such a relief to get out!" she added with a sigh.

"Does Miss Meredith know that Mr. Meredith is going away?" asked Mrs. Barton.

Mrs. Green started, and Miss Lovell cried out:

"My goodness! is he too going? Why, it is getting more and more awful!"

"Oh! yes, Mr. Meredith is going to America," resumed Mrs. Barton, quite delighted to have such a piece of news to tell, "as an engineer, of course. For three years, I believe. He is to have I don't know how many thousand a year; but whether pounds or dollars, is more than I remember."

"I think I'll not tell Miss Meredith just yet," hesitat-

ingly remarked Mrs. Green, "it might be too much for her, you know."

"But why is he going?" asked Miss Lovell, with a broad stare, "that's what *I* want to know."

"Well, he has made himself answerable for poor dear Monsieur de l'Epine, who has been so unfortunate," confidentially replied Mrs. Barton, "and so he goes all that way for the money, I suppose. Then the dear old Captain has had a fit, and Mrs. Groom is gone to see a nephew of hers, who is ill somewhere or other. It is really very sad."

"No, it's awful," said Miss Lovell, emphatically, and feeling convinced that she had found the right word for so lamentable a state of things, she went about the house the whole day, denouncing the whole concern as "awful," till Lady John inquired, with much asperity, "what Miss Lovell meant by it?"—a question which led to an explanation; after which Miss Georgie retired to one of the drawing-room couches, and sat there sulkily nibbling chocolate, of which her considerate cousin had sent her down a fresh supply on reaching Paris.

The afternoon was rainy, and the evening damp and chill. Everyone remained within, and Lady John, Professor Smith, Mrs. Barton, and Mr. Enfield had a game of whist. Miss Gray read, Silvia would not talk, and Miss Lovell was left to chocolate and her own thoughts. There never was much variety in these, and they had not yet emerged from the awfulness into which they had plunged on coming down in the morning, when a bright new idea suddenly occurred to her. Mr. Enfield, in his great zeal, had ascertained and declared that Mr. Meredith was going away the next day

at half-past three in the afternoon, and he concluded that America must of course be his destination. This, indeed, was a mistake; but Miss Lovell was at the age when the correctness of all information is taken for granted. Now, why should not Miss Meredith know this piece of news? thought Miss Georgie. "I know she'll be quite awful," was her mental conclusion; "still, it's not fair to Charlie to let him go away so, and if no one else will meddle, *I* will."

If this resolve had no other merit than that of promising some excitement, that it possessed, at least, and Miss Lovell lost no time in carrying it into execution forthwith, prudently abstaining from giving Lady John any hint as to her intention. She quietly left the drawing-room, and was going upstairs chuckling at her success, when she met Mrs. Green. Something in Miss Lovell's face seemed to warn Mrs. Green, for she stood still as they met, and took an uneasy, questioning look. Miss Lovell, who was anything but a shrewd young lady, thought it best to explain her purpose.

"I shall tell Miss Meredith about Charlie's going, Mrs. Green," she said, affably, "so you keep out of the way till the storm is over."

Mrs. Green remained dumb one moment.

"Miss Meredith is asleep, my love," she said at length—"better wait till she wakens."

"And when will she waken, Mrs. Green?" asked Miss Lovell, puckering up her eyebrows.

"Perhaps towards one or two in the morning. But I am so glad you think it better to wait till to-morrow. You have so much judgment, my dear."

Miss Lovell, who was nibbling a *pastille de chocolat*,

ceased doing so, and looked at her in frank surprise.

"You see, it is so bad to excite her at night," continued Mrs. Green, "for, when excited, Miss Meredith is——"

"Awful," suggested Miss Georgie.

"I am so glad that is your candid opinion. I shall certainly abide by it, and so good night, dear."

She squeezed Miss Lovell's hand, and left that young lady rather perplexed.

"But I didn't give an opinion," thought Miss Georgie. "I know I didn't, and I'll go back and tell her so. Why should Miss Meredith not be wakened, and know that Charles is going away? Let her be awful. I'll waken her myself, if Mrs. Green is afraid."

But on reflection Miss Lovell altered her mind. It might just be a little more awful than would be pleasant to waken Mrs. Meredith. So, all things considered, she returned to the drawing-room, and to chocolate; whilst Mrs. Green, trembling at her escape, went back to Miss Meredith, who lay tossing in all the restlessness of fever; her sleep being one of those fictions in which ladies of Mrs. Green's temper indulge whenever they find it convenient to do so.

"I must have more of that opiate, Green," said the sick lady, with her anxious eyes fastened on Mrs. Green.

"My dear Miss Meredith, you took your dose beforehand. You had better not have another."

"Then, if I don't have it, I shall cough and smother all night," said Miss Meredith, coughing and gasping as she spoke.

"If I give it to her I shall have some sleep," thought

Mrs. Green. There also flitted through her brain a vision of meddling Miss Lovell, coming to tell Miss Meredith of her cousin's departure, and being foiled by finding Miss Meredith asleep. So, all things considered, she thought it best to comply with the sick lady's request, the more so that Miss Meredith renewed it in her sharpest tones, and with her most imperious looks.

"Give me a good spoonful, Green," said Miss Meredith, sitting up to receive the cup of *tisane de guimauve* in which the sleeping potion was to be administered.

Mrs. Green did as she was bid, and Miss Meredith, sinking back on her pillow with a sigh, said, as she turned her face to the wall,

"Now I shall sleep!"

Mrs. Green, on her part, prepared to sit up. She wheeled her arm-chair so that even the mild rays of the night-lamp should not reach her eyes. She placed a comfortable little stool under her feet, and leaning back, she went through what she called sitting up. This was a tolerably easy process. Mrs. Green remained conscientiously awake for half an hour; then for a quarter of an hour she struggled against sleep; then for the next quarter she yielded gently, mentally resolving to waken up soon; then sleep prevailed, and the sun was shining when she woke with a start. Fright was her first feeling. Had she overslept herself? Was Miss Meredith awake, and, if so, what would she say? A slighter offence might cost her the promised legacy. Aghast at the thought, Mrs. Green stole a frightened look at Miss Meredith's face. She looked, and remained motionless, as if spell-bound. Miss Meredith lay with open eyes, parted lips, and clenched hands,

like one who has been conquered in a terrible struggle. And so she had. The enemy had come, and he had prevailed against her. He had entered her room with step softer than Mrs. Green's, he had approached her bed unseen and unheard, and when she woke to his dread presence, knowing him though the darkness of the night lay around them both—it was too late. Too late for ever, too late to grapple with a foe so mighty and so remorseless. Too late for revenge, and may be too late for repentance.

And was it too late for Mrs. Green also? Too late for her promised fortune, too late even for the ten thousand pounds that were to reward years of drudgery and servitude? Pity her that, the first dread shock of surprise over, this thought came to her. We are not all unworldly, we are not all disinterested and high-minded about money. Mrs. Green certainly was not—she turned sick and cold with fear, and without pausing to think, she looked for Miss Meredith's keys. They lay on the bed, as they had fallen from the grasp of the hand that should never more clasp them. Swiftly and eagerly Mrs. Green opened the dead woman's desk. The very first paper she saw was the will—the will as Miss Meredith had put it away unsigned, unwitnessed, and worthless. She stood with the paper in her hand, stunned, though not much surprised, after all. No, she had always felt it would end thus; but yet that end crushed her. It was the close to every hope, to every dream which had made the present less bitter. Nothing was left now—nothing! A step on the stairs roused her. She hastily thrust the paper in her pocket—but the step passed by. Then Mrs. Green recovered her presence of mind,

locked the desk, put back the keys on Miss Meredith's bed, and quietly left the room.

Silvia happened to be the very first person whom she met.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Green, raising her hands in dismay, "only think! I do believe poor Miss Meredith is dead!"

"Dead!" cried Silvia, starting back.

"It was that opiate, that dreadful opiate which killed her," continued Mrs. Green with increasing agitation.

"But is she dead?" asked Silvia.

She passed by her, she opened the door, she approached the bed, and stood and looked in silent awe.

"Well!" said Mrs. Green, who had followed her in.

"Yes, she is dead—really dead," replied Silvia in a low voice; and she felt subdued and downcast, as she remembered how she had last seen that passionate angry face, now so cold and rigid.

CHAPTER XVII.

Now indeed was Lady John's house in a commotion. The burning down of the château was nothing to it. Indeed, to do Lady John justice, a death, a sudden death, too, in her own house, was, as she said herself, more than she had bargained for. This unexpected wrong furnished her with a theme on which she poured forth ample comments.

"You know, Professor Smith," she said to that

gentleman, "that I did not bargain for that. I never so much as invited Miss Meredith, and she came and settled herself, and died here!" resentfully added Lady John, as if she were struck with Miss Meredith's want of consideration.

Miss Meredith's death, indeed, was an event attended with many consequences. Miss Meredith was rich, and notorious for will-making, and Mr. Meredith was her heir-at-law. So even before Doctor Landais had arrived, and pronounced Miss Meredith to be really dead, Lady John sent for her young neighbour. Mr. Enfield's information proved to have been wholly incorrect. For when that gentleman himself zealously rushed off to fetch Mr. Meredith, he found that Mr. Meredith had been gone twenty-four hours—not to America, however—and must be telegraphed for!

"You must have the seals on, Lady John," said busy Mr. Enfield when he dispatched the telegram; "there may be a will amongst Miss Meredith's papers, you know. And you must have the notary, or the greffier, or the maire, or one of these fellows, to seal up everything till Mr. Meredith comes up."

"I shall have nothing of the kind in my house," tartly said Lady John. "Professor Smith shall lock up everything at once."

"Lady John," cried the poor Professor, looking uneasy, "you don't mean——"

"I mean that I am not going to have Miss Meredith's desk and drawers and trunks open to any one or to every one. Both Ada and Mrs. Green may have an interest in her will, and that matter shall be seen to at once. I will have no responsibility."

It was useless to protest, so the Professor submitted,

but with looks which plainly betokened his reluctance. Miss Gray positively declined being present; but Mrs. Green, though she would gladly have stayed away, was borne down by Lady John, and compelled, like the poor Professor, to go up to Miss Meredith's room forthwith.

When they all entered the hushed apartment on tiptoe, they found Symons, Miss Meredith's maid, sitting by the bed on which her dead mistress was already laid out. Symons, whose temper had been much tried, looked sour and scornful as she heard of the intended proceedings. It was evident she considered them as meant against herself. She muttered something, darted an angry look at Lady John, and left the room.

"I really think we should not, Lady John," whispered Professor Smith, much disturbed. "I am afraid it is indecorous."

Lady John's only answer was to open the window, and let in the warm sunshine; but though she tried to look business-like, she was evidently flurried. The Professor was pale, and Mrs. Green cast furtive looks around her. Lady John whispered to her,

"We must have the keys."

"Yes, I suppose so," was the hesitating reply. "But, Lady John——"

She paused; Lady John was glancing round the room in search of Miss Meredith's keys, and not heeding her. Mrs. Green lightly touched her shoulder, and Lady John, looking round, saw her pale face and startled eyes.

"Shall we not draw the curtains of the bed?" whispered Mrs. Green.

"True, you had better," answered Lady John, in the same low tone.

"Perhaps Professor Smith would be so kind," said Mrs. Green, imploringly. She seemed to have a strange dread of and shrinking from the poor dead woman's vicinity.

Professor Smith, on being appealed to, looked decidedly uncomfortable; but he was too good-natured to object, so he went and closed the curtains, fastening them with a pin which Mrs. Green gave him; and Miss Meredith being thus excluded from all knowledge of their proceedings, the search for her keys began.

She lay there very silent and quiet; surely they need not have feared her. She could not raise a hand, or move a finger, or utter a word to check them; and yet they seemed to dread her so. That sharp tongue which could reprove no more, that imperious voice which none could hear again, had not yet lost all their power. Something was left to check and to awe them still. Lady John recovered first. She saw the dead woman's keys, where Symons had laid them, and taking them up, she handed them to Professor Smith. He tried Miss Meredith's desk, and found it locked, as well as her trunk, which stood in a window. He next took the keys out of a bureau, and a large wardrobe; and the proceedings, such as they were, being ended, they all left the room, shut the door, and left Miss Meredith to her rest—the Professor and Mrs. Green both looking much relieved.

"And now, Professor Smith," said Lady John, "you will please to seal up all these keys with your own seal, and to keep them till the funeral is over."

They met Mr. Meredith at the foot of the stair-

case. He had just arrived—not in consequence of Mr. Enfield's telegram, however; and though collected, he was so pale as to be almost colourless. He bowed on hearing what Lady John had done, but made no comment, till she added with her unceremonious frankness,

“I don't fancy there's a will, Mr. Meredith; and of course you come in for all the property, in that case.”

“There may be a will in England,” he replied, a little coldly.

“So there may. What about the funeral, if you please?”

Mr. Meredith stood for awhile, with his hand on the banisters. “I never heard Miss Meredith express any wish on this subject,” he replied; “let us bury her here. If a will should be found later, in which the matter is mentioned, we can have her removed to England, if need be.”

“Did Miss Meredith ever mention this to you?” asked Lady John, turning to Mrs. Green, who stood by them a silent listener.

“Never,” replied Mrs. Green, with a sad shake of the head. “Poor dear soul, she hated to talk of such things!”

“Then I suppose the funeral takes place to-morrow, Mr. Meredith—that is French law, you know.”

“I shall ask for one day's delay. I hope you do not object, Lady John?”

Lady John rather shortly replied that she did not; and this matter being settled, Mr. Meredith bowed again and went up.

“He is going up to her room,” whispered Mrs. Green to Lady John.

Symons had already returned to her post when Mr. Meredith entered the room in which his dead cousin lay.

"You may stay, Symons," he said, as she made a motion to go.

She went to the window. Mr. Meredith sat down in the chair she had left vacant, and looked very long and very earnestly at the dead woman. She had been the tyrant of his childhood and early youth, and she had been so hard to his manhood that he had not been able to bear her yoke. If she left no will her death gave him a noble fortune, independence, and liberty. Who, then, could believe in the depth and sincerity of the sorrow with which he gazed at that pale cold face? They had parted in wrath, but she had loved him, and he knew it; and he, too, had loved her, and he felt grief, sorrow deep and true, that she was dead. He had been a boy in her care, and, after all, she had not always been tyrannical; there had been bright, fond moments for these two, hours of peace and amity, the memory of which now came back with reproachful force and vividness. He could not repent; what he had done he would do again; his mind was too strong and clear for morbid doubts and misgivings, but he could regret that so much bitterness had arisen between them. Oh! if it could have been otherwise! If this woman who had reared him had been more gentle and forbearing, if she had been his friend even more than his benefactress, if she had not tried his patience beyond endurance, there need not have been the memory of an angry parting between them now, and death, though bitter, need not have had the deeper bitterness of a final estrangement. And yet he did

not, he could not believe that her last thoughts of him had been unkind. She had wronged him cruelly. He felt sure that to her remorseless hand he could trace the loss of the girl he loved; and, notwithstanding this, he forgave her so freely, that he felt as if he too must have been forgiven. A truly noble and generous nature ever falls into the error of judging others by its own standard. Mr. Meredith was too large-minded to cherish resentment, and that generous oblivion which he was willing to extend to others he took for granted in his own case. All unkindness, all memory of wrath, was put by as he looked at his dead cousin; and when he rose and pressed a last kiss on her cold cheek, Miss Meredith was forgiven as freely as ever Mr. Meredith hoped to be forgiven.

That peculiar stillness which falls on the dwelling where death is, now fell on Lady John's house. Lady John, who hated restraint of any kind, kept in her own room; Professor Smith and Mr. Enfield got in a corner of the drawing-room, and talked there in whispers, being occasionally joined by Miss Georgie Lovell, who looked scared; and Mrs. Barton, who looked as if her hands were full of business. Mrs. Green and Miss Gray were invisible, unless at meal times, but how engaged no one knew, and Silvia remained in the garden, seeming to shun everyone, and to brood over her own thoughts. Silvia was thinking of Miss Meredith's will, that will which she had witnessed, and which enjoined on Miss Gray and Mr. Meredith that they should marry. How would they feel, how would they act when it was found and read? Could she doubt that they would obey it? And if they did, what was it to her? Her separation from Mr. Meredith was final in

every sense. She had given up Madame de l'Epine, and her old home; she was to become Mr. Lovell's wife, not at some indefinite future period, but in two weeks, and he had gone to Paris to make preparations for their speedy marriage, with her knowledge and consent. What, then, was it to her if Mr. Meredith married Ada Gray? Nothing. She said so to herself again and again, but in vain. Even the remembrance of that poor dead woman, who lay cold and still in her room upstairs, failed to check the rebellious thoughts which would come to the Italian girl's young heart. She would have scorned to feel resentment against one for whom the grave was waiting, but she could not think of Miss Meredith without also thinking, "It is her doing!"

To Lady John's great satisfaction, the morning of the funeral at length came round, and the ceremony, brief, solemn, and impressive, was over. The thought of death is ever pathetic and eloquent, and Silvia, who was much subdued, sat in one of the drawing-room windows, feeling for the time, at least, corrected and penitent. She would have liked her own thoughts best, but this neither Mrs. Barton nor Miss Lovell would suffer. Both these ladies felt much interested in certain proceedings which were even then going on upstairs, but from which they had been excluded. Miss Georgie was loud in her complaints, on which Mrs. Barton kept a running commentary.

"I should have liked to see the looking for a will," said Miss Lovell, pouting.

"My love, Lady John cannot be crowded, and they're seven upstairs—Lady John, Professor Smith,

Mr. Meredith, Miss Gray, Mrs. Green, and Mr. Enfield—no, it's only six."

"What is Professor Smith doing up there?" resentfully asked Miss Lovell.

"He had the keys sealed up, my love."

"Of course he had—just like him—fussy!"

Mrs. Barton ignored the remark, and thought she would go up and see how they were getting on. She soon came back with a graphic report.

"Mr. Meredith and Miss Gray are standing apart in the window. Dear Ada looks lovely in her mourning. Poor Mrs. Green is crying, poor dear; and Professor Smith was going through the sixth drawer in the old bureau, you know, with Lady John and Mr. Enfield looking on.

"Could I not have looked on as well as Mr. Enfield?" asked Miss Lovell, resentfully.

"My dear, they usually prefer gentlemen in these cases."

"There it is!" replied Miss Lovell, getting more and more aggrieved—"girls are always put upon. I may never get the chance of seeing a will looked for, you know."

Mrs. Barton made a soothing remark, which so evidently exasperated Miss Georgie Lovell, that she prudently withdrew again, to see "how they were getting on."

Mrs. Barton remained a good while away. She was a little flurried when she came back.

"Only think," she said, addressing Silvia, for she was still mindful of Miss Lovell's last repulse, "there is no will. All the property goes to Mr. Meredith and poor Ada, and poor dear Mrs. Green gets nothing."

Silvia raised her eyes, and looked earnestly at the speaker.

"Mr. Meredith gets all!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, my dear; he is heir-at-law, and as Miss Meredith left no will——"

"But Miss Meredith did make a will!" exclaimed Silvia, "for Mrs. Groom and I witnessed it."

"Did she really? and to whom did she leave the property, then?" cried Mrs. Barton, all curiosity.

Silvia turned crimson.

"Miss Meredith signed the will, but did not give it to us to read."

"My dear, this must be mentioned. Miss Gray—Lady John," she said, eagerly, as they entered the room, "it seems Miss Meredith made her will, and that Mademoiselle Nardi witnessed it."

At once Silvia was the centre of an eager, questioning group, but she could only repeat what she had already said. It was enough, however, to create a sensation. A will most probably meant that Mr. Meredith was disinherited.

"Professor Smith, what shall I do?" asked Lady John of her prime-minister.

"I think Mr. Meredith should hear Mademoiselle Nardi's statement at once," was Professor Smith's reply. "He cannot be far."

"Why should I tell him?" she asked, impetuously: then, meeting Professor Smith's surprised look, she added, more calmly—"Yes, of course I shall tell him."

A messenger was at once sent for Mr. Meredith. He was soon overtaken, and came back at once, guessing rightly the cause of the summons. When he entered the drawing-room, he saw Lady John sitting in

her red velvet chair; he also saw, half-hidden behind the window-curtain, a dark skirt, and he knew as well as if she had stood in the sunlight who it was that stood there. But he seemed to see Lady John alone, and it was she whom he addressed. Lady John was a little flurried.

"Why, yes, I did send for you," she said; "it seems, Mr. Meredith, that Miss Meredith did make a will."

"I always thought she had. Where did you find it, Lady John?"

"Oh! we have not found it. Only Mademoiselle Nardi says there is a will. My dear, will you tell Mr. Meredith?"

Thus summoned, Silvia came forth. She was very pale, and spite all she could do to conceal her emotion, she trembled. She could not in honour conceal what she knew, and yet the will to whose existence she felt bound to testify would most probably compel, or at least induce, Mr. Meredith to marry Ada Gray. She was another man's promised wife, and yet she could not bear this thought. She could not bear it, but must, as we must all bear so many things that seem intolerable to our frailty.

"Miss Meredith asked me and Mrs. Groom to witness the signing of her will," she said, in a low, even voice; "that was a week ago, I believe. We did so, and she asked us both not to talk of it; so I did not mention it to anyone."

"And where did Miss Meredith put her will away, may I ask?"

"In her desk. It was written on blue paper, like that which you use."

"Foolscap. Did you meet with any foolscap in your search, Lady John?"

"I am sure there was not a scrap."

"Then the will is hidden. Lady John, I am distressed to trouble you again; but this is too important a matter to be put by—too important, at least, to the interests of others. A will may concern Miss Gray very closely. I must ask you to institute another search for this document."

"If it still exists," said Lady John.

"Just so. And the sooner the search takes place the better, I believe."

Lady John quite agreeing to this, they all proceeded once more to the room which had once been Miss Meredith's. It was now bright with sunshine. Bright, warm and gay, but the disturbed aspect which death leaves behind it was on it still. Otherwise it was unchanged.

"I am sure I don't know where to begin," said Lady John.

"Let us just go over it all again," said the Professor.

"Yes, do," urged Miss Lovell, for both she and Mrs. Barton were present now.

Lady John felt too anxious to mind the room being crowded. Lady John was very fond of Ada in her way, and a will might mean a fortune for Miss Gray.

The search began anew with Miss Meredith's desk. It held various papers, letters and bills; they were all minutely examined, but nothing like a will was found.

"Nothing there," said Lady John; and she went to the bureau, with its six small drawers.

Every one of these was searched, but still no will

was discovered. A mahogany clothes press, holding various articles of dress, was tried next. One after one its contents were raised and examined, but still no sheet of foolscap rewarded the search. Lady John began to think there was no will. She was disappointed, and did not care to hide that she was so.

"Are you very sure that you did sign a will?" she said to Silvia, who had followed them upstairs.

Silvia did not answer. She was very pale, and stood amongst them with something in her hand. They looked; it was a sheet of blue foolscap.

"Is that the will?" cried Lady John.

"I believe it is," answered Silvia, a little faintly. "I saw it under the bed, and picked it up."

"It is the will!" cried Lady John, taking it from her hand. "Why, don't you see your signature?"

Silvia looked; she saw her own name and Mrs. Groom's cramped handwriting under it, and she said mechanically:

"Yes, I see it. That is my writing."

Lady John handed the will to Mr. Meredith. The paper had opened in her hands, and involuntarily, perhaps, he allowed his eyes to rest upon it. Ada, who stood behind him, bent forward and glanced at the paper over his shoulder.

He raised his eyes; their looks met, as Silvia, who was watching them, feverishly clasping her hands, saw well. That look between the two cousins lasted one moment only; but Silvia read it well, or thought that she read it.

"They will marry," she thought; and unable to look on, she left the room.

She had time, however, to hear Mr. Meredith saying:

"Perhaps Professor Smith will kindly take charge of this?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE weary day was over, and Silvia sat in Lady John's drawing-room, pale, silent, and apart, till, to her trouble and pain, Mrs. Barton came and sat by her.

There are days and hours when speech is both wearisome and bitter, and this was such a day for her.

"I think there never was a sweeter man than Mr. Meredith," began Mrs. Barton, with her bright, pensive look; "don't you?"

Silvia bit her lip, and turned her head, and did not answer at once.

"Is not Miss Gray very charming, too?" she asked, with a curling lip.

"Oh! such a dear!" cried Mrs. Barton enthusiastically. "*Entre nous*," this was said with a slight whisper, "they are wonderfully suited to each other, and yet, do you know, I do not think they can marry just yet."

"Why not?" asked Silvia, almost sharply.

"Well, Ada has great expectations," meditatively replied Mr. Barton, "but how are people to live upon that, my dear? I daresay they will not marry till he comes back?"

"Where is he going?"

"To America as civil engineer, I believe, for three years they say. Pity to wait three years; but I suspect they will not mind it, either of them."

Silvia was silent.

"You see," said Mrs. Barton, rubbing her knitting-needle thoughtfully up and down her nose, "how are they to marry? There's Mr. Meredith, who has been making such sacrifices for that poor brother-in-law of his, that I dare say he has not a shilling left beyond his professional income. Put that at four or five hundred a year, which, for a young man is really very fair, how are they to marry on five hundred a year—say even six or seven? Suppose they had a villa at Saint John's Wood or Highgate, or anywhere, must they not have a hundred a year rent at least, and two or three servants, two maids, and a page to open the garden gate and clean the knives? Well, then, there's living and dress, and company-seeing, and *children*," added Mrs. Barton; "they never can do it on six hundred a year—never, my dear Mademoiselle Nardi."

Silvia looked at her.

"And Miss Meredith's property?" she exclaimed.

"Ah! to be sure, such a pity for poor Mr. Meredith," said Mrs. Barton, confidentially.

"What is?" asked Silvia impatiently.

"Why, the loss of Miss Meredith's property. It seems she has left it all to Mrs. Green."

Silvia felt stunned. Then Miss Meredith had altered her will, and she had undoubtedly altered it through what Silvia had so imprudently told her. At a time when trouble and grief, and shame and sorrow, were lying in wait for Charles Meredith and his sister, her folly had added ruin.

Mrs. Barton made some trivial remark; but Silvia did not hear or heed her. She sat with hands clasped on her lap, and her eyes fixed on a picture of Wat-

teau's before her. But she did not see it. The shepherdesses in pink and blue satin, with their little feet in high-heeled shoes, stepping so daintily on the smooth green sward, the gallant shepherds piping so faithfully to these fair damsels, were alike unheeded by Silvia. She felt a dull pain because he was going away, and keen remorse because she had helped to ruin him; and a sickening of the heart when she thought of him and Ada Gray. Then suddenly a light flashed upon her mind. Since the will was altered, it was not that which she had witnessed. The signature she had acknowledged as her own that very morning, was, must be, a forgery, and who but Mrs. Green was the forger? She looked up with a sudden start, and saw her at the other end of the room, full-blown, placid as ever. Silvia's mind felt in a tumult; then above that stormy sea rose a strong and clear conviction. The fraud, since fraud there was, must be unveiled by her, and Mr. Meredith must be righted—he must. He would stay at home—of course he would, and marry Ada Gray. Well, what matter? It must be; and what was it to her? That will was not the true will. If the true will was not to be found, Charles Meredith got all, as heir-at-law; and if it was found, why, let him marry Ada. Once more, what was it to her? A sort of fever was on her. She felt bound to see at once about this. Yet to do so she must know more than she knew. She suddenly left Mrs. Barton's side, and putting on a playful face, she went up to Mrs. Green.

“My goodness, Mrs. Green!” she said, “is it true Miss Meredith is leaving you all that money? And I never congratulated you!”

Mrs. Green looked at her. There was a vague doubt in her heavy face, a vague fear in her eyes.

"Yes," she said, hesitatingly, "Miss Meredith had always promised to do something for me, but she was so variable, poor dear, that I scarcely knew whether to hope for it or not. So much as that I never expected. And yet it comes in so well," she added, with a sigh.

"Very true; but poor Mr. Meredith gets nothing."

Mrs. Green looked troubled.

"I am very sorry," she replied; "but you know, dear, that what you told Miss Meredith did set her so against him."

It was Silvia's turn to wince. Yes, she had done it all. She had wrought his undoing and her own, and therefore was she bound to repair it! But the very magnitude of Mrs. Green's guilt, which she did not doubt one second, awed and subdued her impetuous wish for justice. Mr. Meredith must be righted, even at Mrs. Green's expense. But how was she, Silvia, to do it? She detested the crime, but she shrank from punishing the culprit too severely. She did not care about Mrs. Green, but she pitied her; besides, she had received from her some little kindnesses, the memory of which smote her as she thought of the part which she must now act. "If I expose her," Silvia said to her own thoughts, "she is ruined; she becomes the scorn of them all, and who knows how it will end?" A vision of a despairing Mrs. Green, hanging from the bed-post, came to Silvia, and sickened her with fear. Yet what was she to do? She could not—no, she could not let Mr. Meredith be plundered, and grant impunity and a splendid fortune

to Mrs. Green. That was impossible. Suddenly a bright thought struck her. Why not lay the matter before Mr. Meredith himself? He would know how to deal leniently with the culprit; he would know how to spare her, and yet get his own back. Where Silvia saw darkness and ruin, his clear and vigorous mind would find a way out into light.

"My dear, what are you thinking of?" asked Mrs. Green, feeling rather uneasy at seeing Silvia standing thus before her in a brown study.

"When is Mr. Meredith going?" asked Silvia.

"Going!—is he going?" asked Mrs. Green, opening her eyes.

"Did you ask about Mr. Meredith's departure, Mademoiselle Nardi?" exclaimed Mr. Enfield.

Silvia turned round, and replied that she did.

"Mr. Meredith is going at five o'clock to-morrow morning," said Mr. Enfield, triumphant at having been used as a gazette.

The information sobered Silvia. At five the next morning! Then she must act at once. She looked at the slanting sun sweeping with a golden light across the village in the valley; she saw the little grey church tower rising in the yellow sunset, a soft haze floating over the heights, and a brown cloud tinged with gold, floating softly across the blue sky. She watched it, and, like the renegade in the "Bride of Corinth," she gave herself the time it took to pass behind the church-tower for reflection.

"My love, where are you going?" asked Mrs. Barton, as she saw Silvia leaving the drawing-room.

"To take a walk," replied Mademoiselle Nardi care-

lessly. She had decided on seeking and speaking to Charles Meredith at once.

She walked swiftly, and though she knew it not, with a sort of joy. Do what she would, she could not help feeling glad that she was going to prove her repentance, and perhaps, too, to see him once more. She felt in that feverish high-wrought mood in which one thought rules every other. For her that thought was: "He will marry Ada Gray, and it shall be my doing; and I am glad that I am doing it. I am glad that I am not so mean as to grudge him and her money and happiness. I am glad that I shall not so wrong my own soul as to deny justice. I am glad, though I suffer to do this. I know he will be merciful to poor Mrs. Green, if it were only because I ask him."

Unfortunate thought, on which, as on swift pinions, memory flew back to lost days, during which Silvia Nardi had asked boons that had not been denied by Mr. Meredith. And were these days over?—was it possible? Was the story she had once read in his eyes abruptly closed, like a tale of which the teller is weary before it is fairly ended, and will say no more, however much eager listeners may entreat? Was he really going to marry Ada Gray? Should it be her doing just as Mr. Lovell's ring on her finger had come there because she had willed it so?

With this thought came some doubts and fears, which assailed Silvia as she passed the boundaries of Lady John's house. Her way to the château was along a lane that climbed up a hill between two rows of nodding trees growing on high banks, and almost meeting over her head. It was lonely, very lonely;

besides, was it right to be going thus alone to seek Mr. Charles Meredith, and would Mr. Lovell like it?

"I should have asked Lady John or Mrs. Barton to come with me," she thought; "but then they would have wanted to know all about it—and poor Mrs. Green! I would not have told them—I would not. No, I must go and see him myself—I must!"

Yet she stood hesitating. The spot where she thus paused was a deep rocky nook in the lane, that hid the remainder of the path from her view. Beyond that dark barrier of rock and brushwood and drooping trees, seemed to lie her fate; she vaguely felt it, and paused and doubted, till her doubts were set at rest. She heard a step and started, and before she could retrace or resume her course, the tall form and the handsome, though somewhat heavy face of Mr. Lovell appeared before her in the grey light of the place. Silvia remained transfixed, and though Mr. Lovell was not a very clear-sighted man, he soon perceived that he was the very last person Mademoiselle Nardi expected to meet in this solitary spot.

"Didn't expect me back so early?" he said, bending a keen look upon her, though he spoke very carelessly.

"I did not expect you back at all to-day," replied Silvia, rallying; "and I am very glad we have met, Mr. Lovell, for I was standing here feeling very much in want of some one, and not knowing to whom to apply."

Mr. Lovell looked at her with a sort of doubt. In vain her look met his, in vain her voice sounded frank and true; mistrust was at the root of his nature—not

deep, jealous mistrust, but a habitual feeling, none the less powerful for being sluggish.

"Had we not better go back?" he said, taking her arm; "it is getting late, is it not? I felt anxious when they told me you were out alone."

"No, no," cried Silvia, with involuntary eagerness, "we must not go back—we must go on, if you please," she added, more doubtfully.

"Where to?" he asked, almost bluntly.

"I must first speak to you," she replied, in a soft, hesitating tone. "It is about Mr. Meredith."

Mr. Lovell's countenance at once became sullen and overcast; but he was silent, and waited to hear more.

"Do you know he is going away?" she pursued.

"I have heard so."

"To-morrow—to-morrow morning early."

Mr. Lovell was silent.

"Well, I must see him before he goes. I have something to say to him—something which may delay his journey—something," she added, proudly, looking into his face, "which will, I hope, enable him to marry Miss Gray without waiting for her great expectations. For you know he is poor now, quite poor."

"Is he?" sulkily replied Mr. Lovell.

"Well, then, I was going to see him about that when you came upon me here. You do not mind, do you?"

Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers, and looked very black.

"But I do mind!" he exclaimed, angrily. "I do mind it, by Jove!"

"Mr. Lovell," said Silvia, looking him very earnestly in the face, "am I not going to marry you?"

"Just so! Then what do you want to see him for?"

"I have told you that I can render him an important service."

She spoke very coldly. Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers; then a bright idea seemed to dawn across his mind.

"Tell me all about it," he said, briskly, "and I shall see Mr. Meredith with pleasure. I have to see him on business."

Silvia's eyes sparkled angrily.

"I am not a child," she replied; "and if you cannot trust me with a five minutes' conversation with Mr. Meredith, or any other gentleman, I do not think, Mr. Lovell, that you can have much faith in your future wife."

"I don't see that you have much faith in your future husband," he retorted.

Silvia was slightly disconcerted, and both for a while remained silent, and looked at each other thus without speaking. "Have I already got a master?" thought Silvia, with an indignant swelling at her heart. And yet she felt that Mr. Lovell, though not right, was not all wrong, and her natural sense of justice rose within her and reproved her. She walked away a few steps. When she came back to Mr. Lovell she both felt and looked calm, and her resolve was taken.

"Mr. Lovell," she said, quietly, "if what I have to say must be said by me alone, five minutes will do it, and I have not the least objection to your presence. The secret, indeed, is none of mine, yet I know it can be trusted to the keeping of your honour. But see Mr. Meredith I must, and I will," she added, with a resolute look, and something in her voice which told

Mr. Lovell that opposition might exasperate, but could not move her. "You must trust me," she resumed, very firmly; "and your own heart must tell you that you can have nothing to fear from the girl who is thus open with you."

Mr. Lovell was a good-natured man, but by no means a magnanimous one. That speech, therefore, did not affect him as it might have affected one of higher nature; but if he was not great he was honourable, and the appeal Silvia thus made to his nobler feelings was not thrown away.

"Let us go," he said, a little sulkily; and when she took the arm he offered her, he turned in the direction of the château, and put no further questions.

The home where Silvia had spent so many happy days rose before them blackened and desolate-looking in the last red glow of the setting sun, a fit dwelling for the gloomy fortunes of her friends. Silvia's heart smote her for ingratitude as she remembered that in that home the genial Captain was sitting stricken with sorrow, and his daughter was slowly breaking her heart away in shame and grief. Was it her place to have left them in calamity, and chosen another home, and other fortunes, when their home was made desolate, and their fortunes were so low, that they could not well fall lower? But if she gave Mr. Meredith Miss Meredith's inheritance back again, would it not be something?—would it not atone?

As they crossed the court round which the château was built, a fair young woman came out of a side-door, and looked at them in surprise; and Silvia, equally amazed, looked at her too, for this was Madeleine, Jean Varot's sister-in-law.

"Are you here now?" asked Silvia, with involuntary suddenness.

"Yes, until Madame Groom comes back. Mademoiselle wants to see Madame? She is very unwell and in bed, but——"

"No," interrupted Silvia, "we want to see Mr. Meredith—is he within?"

Madeleine answered that he was, and showed them at once to Mr. Meredith's sitting-room on the ground-floor. It belonged to that left wing which had escaped the fire, and Silvia found it unchanged. The very mark of Jean Varot's ball was still on the wall, close to a map of France. The room was vacant, but Madeleine said she would tell Mr. Meredith at once; they would not have to wait long. Mr. Meredith was with the Captain. The door closed on her; her step went away, then ceased. They sat down; neither spoke. Presently a man's foot creaked down the staircase, the door opened, and Mr. Meredith appeared before them. His surprise had had time to subside, so he only bowed with grave politeness; and in answer to Mr. Lovell's inquiries, said, quietly,

"The Captain is still in the same state, and my sister, I am sorry to say, is very unwell."

He sat down, and there was a look of inquiry on his face, which Mr. Lovell answered by saying—

"Mademoiselle Nardi wishes to speak to you on some piece of business or other, I believe."

"I have not yet heard about Mr. Fox," said Charles Meredith.

"And I did not come here to inquire about him," interrupted Silvia, briefly. "All I have to say is this: the will which you saw this morning is a forgery."

In a moment his keen eyes were bent on her face.

"How so, and how do you know it?"

"I know that the will which I witnessed was different from this."

"How so?" he said again; "and how do you know it?"

"What matter if I do know it?" she exclaimed, a little impetuously.

"Yes, but look ye here, Mademoiselle Nardi," remarked Mr. Lovell, who was much surprised, "how can you know it?"

Silvia did not answer.

"The will is certainly in my late cousin's handwriting," said Mr. Meredith, "and you acknowledged your signature this morning. Mrs. Groom's writing I also know."

"Is it true, Mr. Meredith, that this will disinherits you?"

"Quite true."

"Does it contain no clause concerning your marriage with Miss Gray?"

"Her name is no more mentioned in it than mine."

"Then it is not the will I witnessed, for in that"—she paused a little, and her colour deepened—"in that Miss Gray's marriage to you was certainly mentioned."

Mr. Lovell stared, and pulled his whiskers.

"And did Miss Meredith read her will to you?" he asked.

Silvia's lips quivered a little as she felt that she must go through the whole of the bitter story of that night which had made her Mr. Lovell's betrothed wife. But it was useless to struggle against that hard neces-

sity. So in as few words as she could put it, she gave Mr. Meredith the story of her vigil, of Mrs. Green's stolen visit, and of the glimpse she had thus obtained of Miss Meredith's will.

Mr. Lovell's face grew very sullen and heavy as he heard her. He could partly guess now why Mademoiselle Nardi had accepted him so suddenly and so strangely; but Mr. Meredith, whom her tale interested so much, seemed the least moved of the three.

"Is that all?" he asked, as she concluded.

"It is all—but surely it is enough?"

"In one sense it is. And yet I feel perplexed. Mrs. Green expected and deserved a handsome legacy; but I never thought my cousin would leave her every farthing she possessed; and yet if the signatures are forged, the will itself is not."

"You still doubt it?" exclaimed Silvia. "You say 'if,' when I am as sure of it as that I stand here talking to you."

"Because it seems incredible that Mrs. Green should act such a part. Also, to say the truth, that she should be so accomplished a forger."

"Mr. Meredith, I did not dream it. I can explain nothing. I can only state facts, and ask you to be lenient to poor Mrs. Green."

"It will be her own fault if she suffers," he replied gravely.

"And now we may go," said Silvia, with a very full heart as she turned to Mr. Lovell. "Mr. Meredith will know how to act."

He thanked her for the trouble she had taken, but he said not one word to detain them. He walked out

with them through the court to the outer gate, and there he stood to bid them farewell.

"I suppose you can't go to-morrow after this?" said Mr. Lovell.

Mr. Meredith looked surprised.

"I never intended going to-morrow," he said—Mr. Enfield's information again proved incorrect. "The boat does not sail till the tenth of next month."

Mr. Lovell made no comment on hearing that Mr. Meredith had still a fortnight to spend in Saint Rémy; but coldly begging to be remembered to Madame de l'Epine—Silvia had not dared to mention her name—he drew Mademoiselle Nardi's arm within his, and with the look of a man who had got her, and who meant to keep her, he thus walked away.

Charles Meredith stood looking after them for a while, with what a bitter passion of regret his own heart alone knew, and when he turned back with a weary sigh, he met the sad eyes of Madeleine looking at him as he had looked at them.

For some time Mr. Lovell did not speak; at length he asked:

"Mademoiselle Nardi, may I ask if you wish to see Mr. Meredith again before he leaves?"

"I do not," answered Silvia, with a swelling heart.

"Then may I consider that I have your promise not to try and see him?"

Silvia stood still.

"What is your meaning, Mr. Lovell?"

"I have no meaning; but you are very young, very inexperienced, and until you become my wife you are unprotected. And really I can't see why you and Mr.

Meredith should meet, unless as any young lady and gentleman may meet in society."

"I have no wish to meet him again; I do not want to see him any more," replied Silvia, in a low voice, "and if I had not got this thing to tell him, I should not have tried to see him this evening."

"Just so; but you see, if I had not overtaken you, it would have been an awkward sort of thing for you to be calling on Mr. Meredith all alone. However, it is the sort of thing that will not occur again, I know, since he is going away, and all that."

"Will he go if he becomes so rich?"

"Ay, but does he become so rich? Suppose there's another will somewhere in England—and suppose he knows it?"

"But the will which I witnessed is the last, surely?"

"Oh! that will is gone, you know—was not found, and all that. No, I daresay there's a will somewhere in England. Miss Meredith was always at it. I should not wonder if that will were not all for Miss Gray."

Silvia said nothing. She felt bewildered, and a little downcast. She thought she had been giving back a fortune to Mr. Meredith, and now it might be for Miss Gray that she had been working. "Not for her," she thought, with a full heart, "nor yet for him, but for justice. Besides, I will and must abide by what I have chosen. I will not look back, I will not repine, and in good or in evil I will think no more of Mr. Meredith."

CHAPTER XIX.

THEY scarcely spoke till Lady John's house was reached, and then Silvia said, rather faintly,

"I do not feel quite well. I think I shall go up to my room."

Mr. Lovell did not oppose the wish. He thought it likely that Mr. Meredith would try and see Mrs. Green that same evening; and he was rather pleased that Silvia should keep out of his way.

"And Mademoiselle Nardi—what have you done with Mademoiselle Nardi?" said Lady John, as Mr. Lovell entered the drawing-room alone.

"She felt tired—not quite the thing, and went up to her room to rest awhile. Oh! Georgie, I did not see you before. How are you?"

Miss Lovell replied, a little demurely, that she was quite well again, and thanked him for the chocolate he had sent her.

"Oh! I have brought you more," he said, sitting down by her.

"Where is it?" she cried, with sparkling eyes; and at once her busy hands made a raid in the pocket near her.

"No, no, not there, Georgie—in my trunk upstairs—a boxfull."

"Large!" exclaimed Miss Lovell, puckering up her eyebrows.

"Very large."

"Oh! you are such a capital fellow!" she said, gushingly.

Mr. Lovell only pulled his whiskers as he looked

at her; but he was thinking a little remorsefully, "If it were not for that rascally de l'Epine, or for all these jewels I am giving Mademoiselle Nardi, I might have done something handsome for Georgie—I ought to, you know; she's my own cousin; she's poor, and when she does not talk slang, she's a good little soul. Not very pretty, you know—but an uncommonly nice girl!"

"What are you looking at me so for?" asked Miss Lovell, uneasily; "is there anything amiss?"

Mr. Lovell answered that there was not, and resumed his soliloquy, wondering whether he could not do "something" for Georgie, and feeling with regret that he could not, when Miss Lovell herself diverted his thoughts into another channel.

"Aren't they all crazy about Mrs. Green?" she whispered. "You know Miss Meredith has left her all her money? Lucky old girl!"

"Don't, Georgie!"

"Well, and isn't she an old girl, and isn't she lucky? And aren't they all coaching her? Do look at them!"

Mr. Lovell did not answer at once; he did not like to be always fault-finding, yet the word "coaching," as used by his cousin, displeased him doubly—it was slang, and inappropriate slang, which made it worse; and yet there was something in it, and that something made Mr. Lovell forget his little cousin for the time being, and bestow all his attention on Mrs. Green.

She sat at the other end of the room, near one of the doors. She looked the same as ever. Mr. Lovell searched in vain for uneasiness or anxiety in Mrs. Green's full-blown face. She received the congratula-

tions and the homage of the little world around her with the placid unmeaning smile that was habitual to her, fanning herself all the time, for the evening was warm. "Cool," thought Mr. Lovell, remembering that she had most probably forged three signatures, and must be aware that discovery was still possible.

But Mrs. Green's calmness did not last long. The door by which she sat opened. Parker appeared and handed her a card. That was all; but it was enough to make Mrs. Green turn pale. So whilst her hands twitched nervously at her cambric handkerchief, she looked at the card, then she turned to Parker. She seemed to ask if there was no mistake, and his face as plainly answered "None."

So Mrs. Green rose, looked for her fan, then for her smelling-bottle, then sat down again, and Mr. Lovell heard her saying:

"I shall go presently."

"She knows what is coming," he thought.

Mrs. Green did not know it. Had she known it, no persuasion would have induced her to go and meet Mr. Meredith; but calm though she looked, she lived in secret uneasiness and dread, and everything startled and troubled her.

"What can he want with me?" she thought, even with her hand on the door of the dining-room where he sat waiting, and would tell her in a few minutes.

His face told her the moment she crossed the threshold of the room; a pale face, on which fell the light of a solitary lamp, showing her a severe gravity of expression, which Mrs. Green had never read there before. She stood in his presence, not coming forward, unable

to turn back, paralyzed with dread, and waiting for her fate.

It was soon spoken.

"Mrs. Green, I come on an unpleasant errand. For I come to say this: The will this morning—the will bequeathing Miss Meredith's property to you, is a forgery."

"A forgery! Mr. Meredith—I—I do not understand."

Mr. Meredith continued without heeding this—

"Mademoiselle Nardi has just informed me that her signature is forged."

Mrs. Green tried to look bewildered.

"You amaze me, Mr. Meredith, Mademoiselle Nardi acknowledged her signature this morning."

"She was not then acquainted with the nature of the will; that which she signed, and also read, as it seems, was not like this."

Mrs. Green remained petrified. This peril she had forgotten and overlooked. She had foreseen everything save this. But she tried to look surprised, and said:

"In—deed!" opening her eyes very wide.

Mr. Meredith remained silent. He had no more to say.

"Don't you think Mademoiselle Nardi must be mistaken?" she said after a while, and looking hard at him.

"I feel sure Mademoiselle Nardi is not mistaken," he replied.

"And I say she is," retorted Mrs. Green, stubbornly. "Miss Meredith wrote every word of that will with her own hand, then gave it to me to read, then bade me

go and fetch Mademoiselle Nardi and Mrs. Groom. I did not see them witnessing it; but she told me afterwards they did. I know no more; but that is enough."

Mr. Meredith heard her out very calmly, then said: "The will in your hands is a forgery."

"I have not got it," she replied; "Professor Smith has it. What do you want of me, Mr. Meredith? What can I do?"

She tried to look cool, but her hands were shaking visibly.

"Mrs. Green," said Charles Meredith quietly, "for your own sake, you must do something. If I wished for your ruin, need I come and speak to you first?"

"Well, but what am I to do?" persisted Mrs. Green, as if this were the point at issue. "Professor Smith has got the will."

"I met Professor Smith this afternoon, and he told me that, unwilling to undergo the responsibility, he had placed the will in your care."

But the humiliation of her defeat only worked Mrs. Green into a sort of rage and exasperation.

"You want to get the will from me," she said, defiantly and angrily. "You think yourself wronged by the will, Mr. Meredith, every word of which your cousin deliberately wrote, and you want to threaten me into compliance."

"I want," said Mr. Meredith, looking at her with much pity, "to save you from yourself, Mrs. Green. If you prefer ruin, have your own way. But I warn you it must come to a contest between us. If you are worsted, do not say that I gave you no chance of escape, do not upbraid me as harsh and pitiless."

"I know you want to bribe me," replied Mrs. Green,

looking sullen and defiant; "but I say the will is a good will, and I will not give in."

"Very well," he said, rising, "do not."

"I have not got the will," she resumed, bursting into tears. "I tell you I have not."

Mr. Meredith was silent.

"Mr. Meredith," she said, very pitifully, "you know your cousin always promised me ten thousand pounds—you know she did!"

Mr. Meredith answered not one word.

"Mr. Meredith," she said again, "she did promise me ten thousand pounds; and it's as true as I am here, Miss Meredith wrote every word of that will."

"And it is as true as that you and I are here, Mrs. Green, that she never signed it."

Mrs. Green wrung her hands.

"And so I am to get nothing—nothing!" she said, piteously. "Not even the ten thousand pounds I was told of so long!"

If Mrs. Green thought to extract anything in the shape of a promise from him, she was mistaken. Neither directly nor indirectly would Mr. Meredith hold out any hope to Mrs. Green; but he stood, waiting patiently enough for her inevitable submission. It came at last. Mrs. Green was not a wise woman, or she would never have fallen into the egregious error of forging three signatures to a will; but she was clear-sighted enough, the first burst of shame, despair, and humiliation over, to see her danger and avoid it.

"I never thought, Mr. Meredith, it would come to this between us," she said, shedding bitter tears of mingled fear and disappointment; "never. I never thought, knowing as you know, the hard, hard life I

have had with Miss Meredith, that you would be so cruel to me."

Mr. Meredith half smiled, but did not attempt to justify himself.

"Very well, sir," indignantly said Mrs. Green, "I am in your power, and you make me feel it. Very well! But remember to look at home before you show yourself so hard to others."

Professor Smith had given back the will to Mrs. Green, who had put it for safety in a second pocket, in which she always put away her money when she was travelling. From that recess Mrs. Green now took out a paper, and threw it on the table as she spoke. Mr. Meredith took it up, opened it, and read it through carefully. The lines of Miss Meredith's signature alone were slightly tremulous, as if Mrs. Green's heart had failed her then; but her "Silvia Nardi," and her "Mary Groom," showed neither hesitation nor fear. This calm, heavy-looking woman, whose mental gifts Mr. Meredith had always held so cheap, had proved herself a skilful and experienced forger, and, save for an accident, would have been more than a match for him. He quietly put back the will on the table, and said coldly:

"Whether you do so wilfully or not, Mrs. Green, you certainly misunderstand me. I have no business with that document, and I take no personal interest in it. I shall dispute its validity if you attempt to make use of it, and I came to tell you so; but I do not want it. You are welcome to keep it, to do anything you please with it."

Mrs. Green stared at him, more dismayed than if he had uttered the severest threats; and holding out

her hand to arrest him as he attempted to leave the room, she said with some agitation,

"Mr. Meredith, I think that, all things considered, I really ought not to keep that fortune. I daresay if Miss Meredith had lived she would have made another will, and perhaps destroyed this. You will do as you like about the ten thousand pounds, but I feel I must not keep this money."

Mr. Meredith did not answer.

"Miss Meredith always said I was to get ten thousand pounds," piteously said Mrs. Green.

Mr. Meredith looked at her steadily, but not a word passed his lips. There was no help for it—he would promise nothing, do nothing, not even help her to work her own ruin. She took up the will almost desperately, thrust it to the flame of the lamp, then, when it was burning, threw it in the fireplace, where it burned away slowly as that other will, which had made such cruel mischief, had burned a few days before this. Mr. Meredith looked on impassive, almost indifferent.

"That is your own doing," he said.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Green, wearily, "it is."

He bowed and left her.

Mrs. Green remained alone in Lady John's dining-room, staring vacantly around her. Once more wealth had faded away. Once more poverty, but with a grim shadow of disgrace lurking in the background, was to be Mrs. Green's companion through life. It was too much for her. Mrs. Green had gone through some cruel pangs since Miss Meredith's death. There had been the disappointment, the heavy blow, which had almost crushed her; then had come the fierce temptation, the hesitating dread; then the deed done in terror

and trembling, if not of the body, at least of the spirit. And now there was the grievous fall—a second fall, worse than the first—the shame and the terror of discovery. For it is the saddest feature of sin, that, though it blindly trusts chance, it has no faith in the forbearance and generous magnanimity of those whom it has attempted to wrong. Mr. Meredith might talk not now, perhaps, but later; and then there was Silvia. Who was to ensure her silence? Mrs. Green felt in a cold perspiration at the thought. “I must see her—I must speak to her,” thought Mrs. Green; and like a spirit evoked by her wish, and coming at her bidding, Silvia opened the door and entered the room. She came, not thinking to meet anyone, merely to be alone. She had got tired of her room and its solitude, and the thoughts that haunted it. But when, on reaching the drawing-room door, she heard Mr. Meredith’s voice within, she had turned away in sudden fear, and entered the dining-room, which, at this hour, was always lonely. On seeing Mrs. Green, she stood still, and they both exchanged a conscious look. There was a moment’s silence.

“Well, my dear, it is all over,” plaintively said Mrs. Green. “I could not rest under the burden of Miss Meredith’s will, and so I have just burned it—there it is—in the presence of Mr. Meredith himself. I think no one can deny my disinterestedness after that.”

She gave Silvia a furtive look, but Mademoiselle Nardi remained silent and cold. She could not, and would not pretend to believe in Mrs. Green’s magnanimity. So she said, almost drily,

“I think you did very well, Mrs. Green.” And she sat down, resting her elbow on the table, and shading

her eyes with her hand. She was listening to Mr. Meredith's voice in the hall, saying, "Good night, Lady John." He was going. The door closed upon him, the garden gate clanged—he was gone; and Lady John, who wondered what on earth he could have had to say to Mrs. Green, entered the dining-room to learn. She was a little disappointed to find Silvia there.

"Well," she said, a little shortly, "what are you two plotting here?"

Mrs. Green's course now lay clear before her, as she thought. If she could have been wholly silent concerning that unlucky will, she would have liked it very much indeed, but that being impossible, disinterestedness was her only cue.

"I have just burned Miss Meredith's will," she said. "I felt I must do that, Lady John."

"And why did you burn it?" asked Lady John, who went to the point in all things.

"Poor dear Miss Meredith would never have left me all that property if she had lived," sighed Mrs. Green—"I know she would not."

"Well, but she did not live," argued Lady John, bending her shrewd black eyes on Mrs. Green with more surprise than admiration.

Mrs. Green, feeling at a loss, went deeper and deeper into magnanimity.

"Lady John, I have been disinterested all my life, and as I begun, so will I end."

Silvia rose, her lip curling with scorn, and, to Mrs. Green's great relief, she left the room. Disinterestedness like Mrs. Green's is not one of those lights which are meant to remain under a bushel. Lady John conveyed the news to the drawing-room, where they created a

sensation, and Mrs. Green grew hysterical over the laudatory congratulations she received. She was so evidently unwell and miserable, that Mr. Lovell pulled his whiskers in pity as he looked at her, and muttered between his teeth—

“Meredith must have been uncommonly hard upon her. Too bad of him to be so hard to the poor old soul!”

Silvia, who was standing by looking at a book on the table, alone heard him. Her eyes flashed as she said, in a low tone—

“How would you have acted, Mr. Lovell?”

“Oh!” he replied, a little superciliously, “I am not blaming him, you know. Miss Meredith’s money is a great deal to him.”

Silvia bit her lip, and went to one of the windows, where she stood looking out on the dark night, and shrouded by the heavy crimson curtains. Mr. Lovell had said nothing to detain her, but his face grew heavy and dark. It was impossible for him not to see that this girl did not love him, and perhaps he could see clearly enough in his own heart that he did not love her very much himself. And yet he did not even feel tempted to give her up. The latent obstinacy of his nature was roused, and set on this one purpose. It would have been hard to say which he was most bent upon—to have Silvia, or not to let Charles Meredith have her.

Mrs. Green was too much the heroine of the hour for anyone to mind Mr. Lovell’s clouded looks, save his cousin Georgie. She saw that something was amiss, and came and sat down by him.

“Shall I go and bring her back?” she half whispered.

"Bring whom back, Georgie?"

She nodded in the direction of the window. Mr. Lovell coloured slightly. He had not given his little flighty cousin credit for so much clear-sightedness, and her penetration annoyed him.

"Mademoiselle Nardi is not quite the thing this evening," he said—"better leave her quiet, Georgie."

Mrs. Barton now came up to them.

"Anything like Mrs. Green's noble conduct I never heard of!" exclaimed Mrs. Barton gushingly. "I only wonder Mr. Meredith never mentioned it. I suppose he means to do something handsome for her. I feel sure, though, he must have told Miss Gray, for he said something to her which made her turn as white as a sheet; and though I was quite near them, I did not hear a word. I suppose they'll be married soon, but privately and quietly, of course. Poor dear Miss Gray! it was scarcely considerate of Mr. Meredith to tell her so abruptly, but men are very impetuous in these things. Look at her! She is quite upset, and I declare Mrs. Green is gone. I suppose it has been too much for her. I hope it will not make her ill."

Mr. Lovell hoped it would not, and looked after his cousin, who had stolen away and joined Silvia in the window.

"Why do you make him miserable?" was Miss Georgie's impetuous address. "Why do you marry him, if you can't or won't make him happy?"

At first Silvia was too much amazed to speak; then, even before she could think what answer she should make, that quick and sure monitor, Conscience, had shown her the justice of Miss Georgie's reproof. Yes, what right had she to marry Mr. Lovell, if she could

not or would not make him happy? But why should she not make him happy? These repeated struggles were wearing out the strength of her vain yearning towards the past. It was so hopeless to think of breaking her bonds, and going back to one who no longer wished for her. Why, then, not take such happiness as life had in store for her in Mr. Lovell's affection! So spoke reason, whose voice is not always unheard by the young.

A bright smile, not without latent sadness, broke over Silvia's features. She laid her hand on Miss Lovell's arm, and said, with a wearied sigh:

"I will make him happy, Georgie, if I can."

"Then why do you come here and leave him?" asked Miss Lovell with tears in her eyes.

"Oh! but I am going back," gaily said Silvia; and she went back at once, and was as sweet as honey, and as charming as she had ever been or ever could be.

When the waves of life have been troubled for a time, they must needs have rest for a time too. The storm may waken again later, but stillness there must be between the two tempests. So it now was with life in Lady Johne's house. Mrs. Green and Miss Gray left the next day for England on some unexplained, though evidently important errand, but this was the only event which broke on the monotony of the old life.

Meanwhile, Miss Georgie Lovell had no need to interfere again between her cousin and Mademoiselle Nardi. Silvia had made up her mind to be very good, and she was so. Besides, Cavaliere Nardi had written, and, glad to be rid of his charge, given his consent;

so now her fate might take its course. Lady John had kindly said:

“You must be married from my house.”

There were days when that reality, “married,” filled Silvia with a sort of awe. Sometimes, girl-like, she thought the day so far away that it would never come; and other times she looked it bravely in the face and defied it to scare her. But whatever she felt, her outward manner to Mr. Lovell was unexceptionable.

Mr. Lovell was too indolent to be a man of keen penetration. His doubts and fears, if they did not vanish utterly, were at least so pleasantly lulled to rest, that he forgot them in the preparations for the great event of his life—an event to which he evidently looked forward with the satisfaction of a man who never doubted the correctness of his taste, or the soundness of his judgment.

Silvia looked without a thought and a care, and no one suspected that she was not the happiest of women. Yet there was a dark cloud on her mind, with which Mr. Meredith was but indirectly concerned. She was estranged from her friend Madame de l'Epine, that was her trouble. How she was, how the Captain was, she only knew by hearsay. She did not dare to go near them, or attempt to cross the threshold of the château. The place that had sheltered her so long was to know her no more.

CHAPTER XX.

A LURID sky, telling of coming storm, bent its dark and sullen clouds above the pale green of sunlit trees in Lady John's garden. Yet, instead of turning back to the house, Silvia went on; the face of nature seemed to have passed away from before her eyes, for though she looked around her she saw nothing. She felt strangely calm, and had felt so for some time. She wondered, indeed, at her own composure and was proud of it, forgetting that the lethargy which is like death is neither the courage of resignation nor the sweet calmness of happiness. She looked on the past as we look on a feverish dream, and smiled at it like one who knew better. Sometimes, indeed, she felt as if she were getting very old, and other times a strange sense of *ennui* crept upon her; but that was the exception, not the rule. Her habitual state was that death-like stillness which lay hidden at her heart, but left her eyes bright and her cheeks fresh and blooming, and did not even make her very silent.

She now walked on, neither minding the blackness of the sky, nor heeding whither her steps took her, until, suddenly looking up, she found herself in that gloomy avenue where Mr. Lovell practised shooting. She had never been there before, and thought this a dreary place. Before her rose the damp, broken wall, with ivy hanging down its grey stones, the double row of trees, and at the further end the pale target rising on a dark background. Mechanically she walked towards it. The board was riddled with marks, some of which were dangerously near the centre. But Silvia

did not think of this. Curiously she peeped round into a deep dark hole behind the board, and saw a sort of grotto. Hesitatingly, yet impelled by a curiosity in which she, for the time at least, forgot all else, Silvia, entered this recess. The rocks which man's hand had once brought there, nature had now claimed and made her own. She had set ferns in hidden crannies, thrown ivy on every rock, and filled the spot with a dark green growth.

Whilst Silvia was looking curiously round her, a sudden flash of light passed across the brown walls of rock, then a low peal of thunder followed. She turned to the opening of the grotto, but a white sheet of rain, coming down with the might of a West Indian tempest, already spread between her and the path.

"Well," she said to herself, "what matter! Nothing calls me within—I can wait here. Mr. Lovell is not at home to miss me—and no one else will."

She sat on a low projection of rock, and clasping her hands around her knees, looked at the falling rain with a mixture of sadness and *ennui*. She began to wonder if she would always feel as she had felt of late. If days would always seem so tedious, and everything and everyone so wearisome. She remembered other days than these in Palazzo Nardi, where she lived unloved and uncared for, and yet was as happy as a bird in a cage, that sings ever so gaily, though it knows not the hand that feeds it. She remembered Dom Sabino's orchard, and the Principessa knitting in the shade, and a bright girl, a little restless, perhaps, but light-hearted, who went about the old place like a dancing sunbeam. She remembered a traveller to whom everything was wonderful, interesting, and new, who

lived in an old French home, between an accomplished gentleman and an amiable woman, and who, spite her faults and little follies, was very dear to both.

"And all that was happiness, true happiness," thought Silvia; "but, oh! this is not—this is not, and can it ever be?—oh! can it ever be?"

The reply sickened her—it was so stern, so inexorable. And yet Silvia was not young in vain—not in vain was she of a buoyant temper and a hopeful nature, and especially inexperienced. She had no true conception of the miseries of an ill-assorted marriage. Hers was the excuse of many a heedless girl, who rushes on her fate, blind and unconscious of its wretchedness. She tried to think that to be the wife of a rich man, who loved her, would make her happy; and if she could not think so, if a truer voice whispered to her that happiness lay not there, Silvia felt almost angry with herself, and called this wisdom of the heart the merest folly.

As she sat thus, looking at the still falling rain, and not seeing it, a flash of lightning, which lit the avenue, the walls, the trees, the gravel path, and the heavy-drooping boughs with a lurid light, and a low, growling thunder peal, roused her from married life with Mr. Lovell to the realities of a storm at hand. Her first impulse was to run home through the rain, her second to stay where she was. "I am not afraid," she thought, with a little secret boast in her own bravery; "and I have never been out in a storm yet."

So she sat, watching flash after flash, listening to peal after peal, till blackness fell upon the prospect—a darkness which came from declining day, as well as from the storm. Rain, thunder and lightning still held

their own, and no one came for her. Mr. Lovell was out, and no one else missed her. A sense of desolation crept over Silvia little by little, and a puerile tear found its way to her eyelids. "I need not be quite so lonely as all that," she thought; "I have done no great harm—I have, I hope, mended the mischief I wrought in one instance, and I cannot say that Mr. Meredith looked heart-broken. Then why does no one care for or come for me?" She was making a wrong and a grievance of this, after the fashion of the young, when a low sound diverted her attention. She looked round, and raising her eyes in the direction whence the sound came, she saw rising above the ivied wall the pale, sinister head of Jean Varot. Fear, more than presence of mind, kept her mute, and, indeed, petrified her. She stared up at the apparition, and saw the head followed by shoulders, then by the whole body, till it hung suspended from the two strong bony hands; and the long legs nearly reached the ground, on which the heavily-shod feet soon fell, with a low, dull sound.

For a moment Mr. Meredith's old enemy stood and looked around him with a slow, cautious, cool, self-possessed look—the look of a man who can reckon up all his chances; then, satisfied of his solitude, he steadily crossed the avenue and vanished. Silvia rose, as if moved on springs. A lightning flash passed across her eyes, and she did not heed it; thunder rolled in sullen above her head, and she heard it not. She came out of the grotto, and walking out in the rain through the broad pools which flashed across the path, she left the avenue where Jean Varot had left it. He had already vanished, but instinct, unerring and

sure, led Silvia's steps. She did not pause to think, she did not hesitate one second. Swift as her feet could carry her, she went to the postern door. It was open, the lock had been forced, and, as if to convince her that Jean Varot had preceded her, two broad and deep footprints appeared in the damp earth.

There was not a moment to lose, not a second. If Mr. Lovell had never existed, Silvia could not have forgotten him more completely than she forgot him then. Their marriage, his jealous mistrust of Mr. Meredith, her promise not to attempt to see him, seemed to sink into an abyss, and be buried there, so wholly did terror of the present banish even that recent past.

But what road had Jean Varot taken? Not the straight path, straight as an arrow's course, or a bird's flight, along which Silvia was speeding. Yet neither breath nor strength failed her as she ran. Not for one second. A desire, a fear, a passionate hope, stronger than all else, bore her on through rain and storm; for neither had ceased, till she reached the château. Day had yielded to twilight as she stood on the terrace, and a lamp was burning in Mr. Meredith's study; the curtains were drawn back, and she saw him standing alone near his bureau.

"Thank God it is not too late!" thought Silvia, and in that joy she forgot all else.

She crossed the terrace; she would not delay by entering the house. She ran up to his window, and, tapping against the glass, she called him softly:

"Mr. Meredith! Mr. Meredith, open quickly!—it is I!"

Mr. Meredith heard the summons, and obeyed

them, and stood looking with amazement on Silvia's pale face and dripping garments; but she gave him no time for wonder or for questioning.

"Jean Varot is coming!" she said breathlessly. "Coming to murder you!"

And before Mr. Meredith could utter a word she flew to the lamp on the table and extinguished it.

"Come, come away, leave the room!" she exclaimed, turning towards him. "Oh! do, for pity's sake, leave this room, Mr. Meredith."

"Dear Mademoiselle Nardi," he began soothingly, "Jean Varot is dead."

"Oh! you will drive me wild," she exclaimed, in a voice full of despair. "I tell you I have seen him—that I ran all the way—that he is coming to kill you!"

He could not resist her distress, her pleading voice; he took her hand, led her to the next room, and closing the door, he lit one of the waxlights on the mantelpiece, and turned towards her. She was pale as death, and her tears mingled with the raindrops sparkling on her face.

Oh! strange, tormenting power of love. Charles Meredith's thought as he saw her was not "Is Jean Varot really come back—from death to life—come back to murder me? but "That girl loves me, and I could have her, I could have her!" Keen, bitter, intolerable temptation.

She was another man's promised wife, and that other man had helped him to save his sister's name from disgrace. Oh! honour, honour! Thou hast bitter laws of thine own, laws not written in human codes, but which a true heart must obey, come what will!

"For heaven's sake do something, lose no time!"

she faltered. "Why should that man seek you if he means no evil!"

"But he is dead," argued Mr. Meredith, still incredulous.

"I have seen him. I did not dream it. I have seen him; as true as we both stand here, Mr. Meredith."

He was much perplexed. Her earnestness convinced him spite the certainty he felt of Jean Varot's death. Yet he was loath to act.

"Mademoiselle Nardi," he said after a while, "let it be that this man is living, and seeks me for a deadly purpose, as you say. I still wish to spare him, if I can. In half an hour I leave this house for years. Jean Varot will scarcely overtake me in America."

"Then, if you are going, oh! go at once," she entreated. "Go by the front gate at once, whilst he is lurking in the garden."

"There is no need for haste," he said quietly; "he cannot know the moment of my departure. He will bide his opportunity, and miss it, as a matter of course. I have already told you that I have nothing to fear from Jean Varot face to face."

He argued with her more as if to pacify her than as if convinced of his own peril.

"Besides," he continued, "I would spare this Jean Varot, if I could. The man is mad, and madness takes guilt away. I repeat it, I shall be gone before he can harm me. Allow me, therefore, to make a communication to you, which I meant to entrust to writing. I have heard from Mr. Fox. Here is his letter. It will explain to you how another claimant has appeared, and I fear one who, being the real heir-at-law, leaves you no chance of the twenty thousand pounds."

He placed a letter in her hand as he spoke. Silvia took it; she had heard and understood him, but her mind was far away from the words he uttered. She tried to control her feelings, to be calm, to be like Mr. Meredith, cool and unconcerned, but she could not. Her bosom heaved, her breath grew short, and flinging herself across a table, she burst into sobs and tears. He bent over her much affected.

"Pray do not!" he entreated. "What shall I do? Speak, and I will do it."

"Send a messenger to the Maire," she said impetuously, "and ask for gendarmes. I know there are two in Saint Rémy—I saw them going from Lady John's terrace, and they always spend the night at the mairie."

Spite his promise to obey her, Mr. Meredith hesitated; and whilst he stood thus irresolute, they both heard through the pealing of the storm, which had not ceased all this time, though it was dying away, the deep baying of a dog.

"That is Pataud," said Silvia, under her breath.

"Yes," he answered, "it is Pataud;" and both exchanged looks, for both had the same thought.

The barking, which grew louder and louder, came from the avenue facing Mr. Meredith's study. Silvia grew faint and sick. The window of that room was closed, not fastened. Why should not Jean Varot come in and follow them? She flew to the door by which they had entered, and locked it.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Meredith, "I must see what this is."

A red spot had risen to his cheek, and his eyes flashed. That spirit of strife and battle, which is at the root of every man's nature, was roused within him.

"I will not let you go to that man!" said Silvia desperately.

"I must," he said; but she stood with her hand on the lock of the door, and, compelled to pause, he stood before her.

The barking became furious, and mingled with a loud peal of thunder, sudden and terrible, which seemed to shake the château to its foundations. Silvia's arms fell, and she stepped back in her terror. In a moment Mr. Meredith had opened the door, and was gone. She was so stunned that she made no attempt to stop him. A rush of damp air, which came in through the open door, revived her a little.

"I will go too," she thought desperately, and she went.

She took no light. She entered Mr. Meredith's study. It was dark, silent, and empty. The pale maps on the wall gleamed faintly in the gloomy twilight. The storm had ceased again, but the huge black clouds that passed in the sky seemed ready to come in through the open window. Silvia stepped out on the terrace.

Far away in the east a misty moon was struggling into light, and showed her the steps still glistening with the rain that had washed them. The black trees of the avenue rose tall and giant-like before her. Everything was very still, the château was dark, and the night was so silent that all Silvia heard was the sound of her own light step hurrying across the flags of the terrace. Suddenly a long plaintive howl rose on the quiet air—a howl not of pain or of suffering, but of lament. Silvia stood still a moment, then ran down the stone steps which led to the avenue.

She had no need to go far. The grey moonlight

showed her Mr. Meredith bending over something dark lying on the earth, and Pataud sitting by him and howling lamentably with upraised head.

"Mr. Meredith, are you safe?" she whispered. "What has happened? What is it?"

"Dead—shot to the heart by his own hand, and with his own weapon," replied Mr. Meredith almost sadly.

She shrank behind him, but she could not help seeing the dead man on the earth, lying there with his stern rigid face turned up to the pale light of the sky; and she saw, too, the gleaming steel of a weapon still fastened in the bush that had caught it, and sent its contents through its owner's heart.

"And is he dead?" she said.

"He is dead. Heaven knows how it happened! Perhaps he wanted to kill the dog. That last thunder-clap prevented us from hearing the shot; but you were right—this is, or rather was, Jean Varot. Well, all is over now. But I wish you had not seen this."

He wanted to lead her away, but she stood still.

"What shall we do?" she asked, in that low, hushed voice, which sounds as if it feared to waken the dead.

He did not answer, but took her arm, and led her in. Still, without speaking, he struck a light, and closed the window, then said,

"For my dear sister's sake—for the sake even of that unhappy man's memory, I would rather never speak of what happened this night. You can keep a secret, as I know of old—will you keep this for me?"

"Yes," said Silvia, who had turned a little pale; "but how can this be?"

"No one will think of questioning you."

"But—but the body?" she faltered.

"I shall see to that before I go."

"Then you are going?"

"Yes, at once."

"To America?" He assented.

"And Miss Meredith's property?" she could not help saying.

He seemed surprised.

"Did you not know that a will in Miss Gray's favour has been found in England?"

Silvia looked confounded.

"Then you are a poor man?" she could not help saying, even though Jean Varot was lying in the avenue, with his dead face turned to the sky.

"I can work," he said, a little coldly.

Even as he spoke, there was a tap at the door, and Mr. Meredith went and opened it, whilst Silvia shrank back. It was only Mrs. Groom, who said:

"Pierre has come for Pataud, sir; he has got loose from him, and come here, he says. I am sure it is he who is making that horrible noise. Something must have happened."

As she said this, Mrs. Groom caught sight of Silvia, who, seeing herself discovered, came forward.

"Mrs. Groom will see you to the postern-door, Mademoiselle Nardi," said Mr. Meredith, significantly.

Mrs. Groom looked from him to Silvia, and seemed to hesitate.

"Something must have happened for the dog to howl so, sir," she said.

"Send Pierre to me," was Mr. Meredith's only reply. He turned to Silvia. "Good-bye," he said.

"Good-bye," she answered.

He held out his hand; she placed hers in it, and that was all. The spectre of Honour stood between them, and guarded Mr. Lovell's betrothed from aught save the cold courtesy we grant to strangers.

"Did he ever love me?" thought Silvia, sadly and humbly, as she turned away.

CHAPTER XXI.

"SOMETHING has happened," thought Mrs. Groom, as she felt Silvia shrinking by her side, and clinging to her when they crossed the terrace, and walked past the haunted avenue, leaving it to their right, but all she said was—"I wish that dog would cease howling."

She had brought a lantern with her, and held it so as to light Silvia's feet. She never looked behind, but Silvia twice glanced back. Once she saw that Mr. Meredith's window was dark again, and another time she perceived a light amongst the trees near the spot where Jean Varot was lying. Mrs. Groom, who did not look round, saw nothing, but she said—

"I am glad Pataud has given up howling. I hate to hear a dog howl. I know it's nonsense, but my Philip is ill, you see, and nonsense will come into one's head, whether one likes it or not."

Silvia made an effort to speak.

"Is your nephew with you now, Mrs. Groom?"

"He is, mamzelle—I went and fetched him, poor boy. He got as far as Marseilles, and broke down there, so I went and brought him back. I have got all his pictures. I am sorry there will be no time for you to see them, mamzelle."

"Are you going away, Mrs. Groom?" asked Silvia, suddenly startled.

"Yes, to England with my Philip. I know the poor boy went wrong—I know he did—but he is very ill, *mamzelle*," added Mrs. Groom, with a tremor in her voice, "and I shall do my best for him till he gets out of trouble again."

"And is Madame de l'Epine going too?" asked Silvia, hesitatingly.

"Oh! of course. You know, I suppose, that she is not here, and does not intend coming back? She and the Captain are to go to England with Mr. Meredith, and part from him there. I believe they mean to remain. The doctor said the poor Captain would never get well here. The change may do something. And here is the postern door, so good night, and good-bye, *mamzelle*. Some of your things have remained at the *château*, but Madeleine has the keys—Madame Varot, you know—and she will take them to you."

Once more she bade her good night, pushing open the postern door as she spoke; then she was gone, and Silvia, who had declined taking the lantern, remained alone in the darkness.

Amazement is the feeling which predominates in the great crises that take us out of the life in which we move so calmly day after day. Joy, grief, horror, even, are not so powerful as this strange surprise, which lies on us like a spell, suspending all else, giving us a calmness which does not spring from peace, and a passive strength that is not courage. When Silvia walked alone through the gloom of Lady John's garden, she began to waken from this trance, and to return to a sense of the terrible realities through which

she had passed for the last hour. She felt, for the first time, that she had been wet, and that she was cold, and she shivered as she walked. She remembered that Jean Varot was living, when everyone thought him dead, and she wondered whether he was really dead now! What if he were not? She stood still. It seemed as if her senses were leaving her. And she put that question to her own heart which in seasons of agitation we all put: "Is this a dream, or am I indeed awake? Can this anguish or this terror be really true?" For in times of heavy trouble the longing wish to deny inevitable griefs is strong indeed. We want to think that our sorrows are visions, and to conquer them by unbelief. Silvia had felt so once before, when her mother died. Then the silence of the sick-room had seemed the unreal thing, and the low voice of complaint, the wearied eyes and pining face, just lost and gone, had been the tangible truth, not the dream. She remembered that feeling now; different, though, was the terror of this night from the sorrow of her childhood, and the sense of reality soon came back to her quick and piercing. She had dreamed nothing. She had seen Jean Varot coming down the wall of Lady John's garden—she had followed him to the château—she had warned Mr. Meredith, and perhaps saved his life—and she had seen the dead man lying in the avenue, with Pataud howling lamentably by his side. Then she had bid Mr. Meredith good-bye, and it had all been over.

"And it is all over," she said to herself, "all over," she added, mechanically, as she entered Lady John's house.

The hall was lit as usual, and at the foot of the

stairs, with his hand resting on the banisters, in an attitude of perplexity and doubt, stood Mr. Lovell. Silvia started as she saw him—she had forgotten his existence till then. They stood face to face, and both were silent for a moment; then, with a sullen look, he said:

“I am afraid you got very wet, Mademoiselle Nardi?”

“Very wet indeed. I must go up to my room at once.”

He did not move, but she passed by him. Mr. Lovell remained in the same attitude. He was there still when Silvia came down again in a few minutes. She was not surprised; she had read in his face that he would remain there waiting for her.

“Before you go into the drawing-room,” he said, “will you kindly favour me with a few minutes’ conversation?”

Silvia bent her head in token of assent. He opened the door of the dining-room, and entered it after her.

“Mademoiselle Nardi,” he said, “I will not pretend to doubt where you have been, for I know it. I went out to look for you in the storm, and I found this handkerchief, yours, by the open postern door. You were at the château?”

“Yes,” answered Silvia, “I was.”

“To see Madame de l’Epine, of course?”

If Silvia had thought the question sincere, she could have answered it calmly and sincerely; but Mr. Lovell’s eyes and Mr. Lovell’s voice, and his whole manner, plainly said, “Madame de l’Epine is not at St. Rémy, and I know it.”

“No,” she answered, a little defiantly, “I went to see her brother, Mr. Lovell.”

"Mademoiselle Nardi, do you not think you may try me too much?"

"How so?"

"Does it not occur to you that, after the promise you gave me, I may insist on having deeds as well as words?"

Mr. Lovell spoke almost angrily; but he had mistaken his ground. Jealousy had put him in a sullen, silent fever for the last hour, and he forgot that Silvia did not love him. Just then she did not even care to keep him, for she had lived through a lifetime within the last hour, and felt as if she cared for nothing. The blood rushed to her face, and dyed it crimson, on hearing herself thus accused, without so much as an explanation of her conduct being asked.

"What else have you got to say?" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"I have to say, Mademoiselle Nardi, that I will not bear this; that the girl who is to become my wife must not act so strangely without my knowledge or sanction."

"Are you in earnest!" she said, amazed.

"Quite in earnest."

She heard him with a bright, haughty smile on her lip, and her fingers playing with the diamond ring which had been the pledge of their betrothal. They pushed the glittering bauble up and down, and when he ceased, took it off and placed it on the table between them.

"Now you may speak," she said; "and what you say need not at least offend me. And now, too, I may justify myself without meanness."

Mr. Lovell looked at her sullenly, but said not one word.

"What I have done I would do again," said Silvia; "I would do it even though my heartstrings should break at our parting. Appearances condemn me, I grant it, but if you could not believe in me, you should at least question before you pass judgment. I might have borne with much, because I felt I did not love you as much as you should have been loved by me. But this I will not bear. The woman who is to become your wife must, you say, be subject to your control. Be it so; but the man who cannot trust me shall never call me his wife, Mr. Lovell."

"Very well," he said angrily.

There was a moment's pause; then she bowed and left the room, and Mr. Lovell, bowing too, said not one word to detain her. He remained alone, angry, mortified, amazed, and indignant. He had bided his time all these years for a paragon wife, and that paragon, when found, would not submit to remonstrance, and left him by on the first word of reproof. In the heat of his resentment and wounded pride, Mr. Lovell almost vowed never to run so humiliating a risk a second time. But he was not allowed to linger over these bitter thoughts. Miss Georgie Lovell, sent by Lady John, who had heard that Silvia had been found, and could not imagine what kept her and Mr. Lovell away, now put in her little face at the dining-room door. At once she saw that something had happened, and came in with a scared look.

"Oh! Gerald, what is it?" she cried.

The bright diamond ring, which lay on the table where Silvia had put it, seemed to answer her question.

She saw it, took it up, looked at her cousin; then her eyes, fast filling with big, round tears, she uttered a most pitiful, childish and pathetic little "Oh!"

"Don't, Georgie!" said Mr. Lovell, hurriedly; and he looked at his watch.

"Where is she?" said Miss Georgie impetuously. "She promised she would be good; she must take the ring back."

Her hand was already on the door, but a very imperative "Don't!" from Mr. Lovell stopped her at once.

"I forbid you to say a word to Mademoiselle Nardi," he said, looking almost angry. "She took that ring off—no finger of mine shall ever put it on her hand again."

Georgie submissively handed him the ring, but he would not take it.

"Keep it," he said impatiently. "I don't want it; and do, like a good girl, ask Lady John to let me have five minutes' conversation with her. If I lose no time I can catch the train, and be off to-night."

"And what am I to do with the ring?" asked Miss Georgie Lovell wistfully.

"Keep it and wear it, Georgie. I wish it was to you, or to a good girl like you, I had given it from the first."

"Thank you, Gerald," said Miss Lovell, slipping the ring on her finger. "I shall always keep it and wear it for your sake; but, you know, I am quite willing to give it back to Mademoiselle Nardi when you like."

"That will be never, Georgie; and now do go and give my message to Lady John, will you?"

Miss Lovell obeyed; and presently Lady John came back alone, and heard Mr. Lovell with evident concern and surprise, informing her that, as Mademoiselle Nardi and he had agreed to give up their engagement, he must leave her house at once.

"Are you sure you will not repent this, Mr. Lovell?" she said gravely.

"Quite sure."

"When I saw Georgie come in with Mademoiselle Nardi's ring on her finger, I knew something strange had happened. Do you really wish her—Georgie, I mean—to keep and wear that ring?"

"Do you see any objection to it, Lady John?"

"I fancy that Mademoiselle Nardi will think it strange. It might put very odd ideas in her head."

Mr. Lovell became crimson.

"Georgie is a child," he said, "and my cousin. Nevertheless, if you will say a few words on the subject to her, Georgie will not, I am sure, wear the ring in Mademoiselle Nardi's presence. But the ring is hers now—not mine."

"Mind my words," said Lady John to Mrs. Barton that evening, after Mr. Lovell was gone, "he will marry Georgie. Just because he gave her Mademoiselle Nardi's ring, he will marry her."

That he would never marry Silvia, and that she would never marry him, was very apparent to Lady John when she went up to Mademoiselle Nardi's room. She found her leaning back in an armchair, gazing at the sphinx on the mantelpiece, and looking very grave.

"My dear, what is all this?" she said kindly. "Is it possible that you and Mr. Lovell are parting?"

"Yes," answered Silvia quietly. "Mr. Lovell was displeased because I went this evening to speak to Mr. Meredith at the château—and perhaps he was right in thinking I ought not to have gone; but he was mistaken concerning my motives, and we are best apart."

"But Mr. Meredith is gone!" said Lady John, a little bewildered at this new version—"gone for three years; he drove by a few minutes ago."

"Yes," said Silvia, still speaking very quietly. "I heard the carriage, and guessed it was he."

"And Mr. Lovell talks of going too," said Lady John. "My dear child, it is a pity to lose a man like Mr. Lovell for a trifling misunderstanding."

"Mr. Lovell is rich, and thinks too much of himself because he is rich," said Silvia calmly.

"Well, but, dear, you are not such a poor girl—you are to have twenty thousand pounds."

"No," interrupted Silvia, still very calm, "Mr. Fox was mistaken—I am to have nothing. I am as poor as I was when I first entered this room a year—is it a year?—ago. And, Lady John, I want to ask a favour of you. Friends of yours are going to Italy, I know. Do you think they would take me? I should give very little trouble."

"And Madame de l'Epine?" said Lady John, opening her eyes wide.

Silvia's lips quivered, but she controlled herself, and said:

"I have lost Madame de l'Epine through my fault, and I must abide by what I have done. Besides, she is going to England, and I want to go back to Italy."

"Well—but is it all over with Mr. Lovell?" persisted Lady John.

"It is all over. He is too rich. The girl who marries him must never forget that he is a rich man, and I could not be always thinking of that. Besides, we are best apart. He should never have asked me to marry him, and I should never have agreed to become his wife."

Silvia was so quiet that Lady John felt silenced, and after a while left her. Silvia remained alone—she remained as Lady John had left her, sitting in the armchair; and she stayed thus till dawn, going over the past year, casting up accounts with Fate, and humbly confessing that if she had been worsted in her little battle with life, the blame was all her own.

"If I have been fickle and unkind," she said to her own thoughts, "I might have been good and true; and if I have been unfortunate, I might have been happy. I do not know if Mr. Meredith cares for me still; but I do know that he will never ask me to marry him. He is proud, he is very proud, is Mr. Meredith, and he will never give Mr. Lovell the right to say, 'That man's brother-in-law robbed me of my money, and that man himself robbed me of the girl whom I loved.' And so I may now go back to Sorrento, like that poor Cardinal he once told me of."

Three days later Silvia left Lady John's house wrecked in hope, in fortune, and in love.

Dom Sabino sat reading Horace again in the green garden where we saw him first. The blue bay sparkled in the morning sunshine, and the yellow smoke above Vesuvius looked warm and golden in that early radiance. Silvia sat by him, knitting edgings for the Principessa's tovaglie.

Sorrow had humbled her, and she had bent her will to that aversion of her youth. She was not much altered. Dom Sabino found her pale and thin when she came back to them, and the Principessa said very ruefully, as she gave her a wistful look:

“*Carina*, what have they been doing to you?”

But though Silvia laid her head on the kind lady's shoulder, and cried there a little, she seemed more wearied than sorrowful, and soon recovered her early bloom, and her buoyant spirits.

Dom Sabino now thought, as he glanced towards her:

“I knew the little bird would come back to its cage. She has had a railway accident, a fire, and a love affair!” Dom Sabino knew that Silvia had been on the eve of marriage with a rich Mr. Lovell, “Silvia has learned to her cost that it is not good for young girls to travel.”

“*Silvia mia*,” he said aloud, “you forget that my sister told you not to be long.”

Silvia seemed to waken out of a dream; she had grown rather absent of late, and quickly putting by her work on her chair, she walked towards the house. She walked fast at first, then her pace slackened, and when she reached the door, she stood still, and looked down at the bay. Her eyes were fastened on that placid sea and smoking mountain, yet these were not what Silvia saw just then. Silvia saw another spot than this—a place sweet, tranquil, and fair, with ivy-covered columns encircling a clear pool, and a mildewed statue perpetually gazing down in the clear waters. The morning sunlight fell in a warm golden streak on a group of young trees, the light breezes moved among the boughs, and there was a twittering and a warbling

murmur from that green bower, which was very sweet to Silvia's ear. She liked this lonely spot, with the silent railway-line beyond it; she liked that quaint-looking old château, where the genial Captain's laugh echoed so gaily, and that open window by which his grave daughter sat reading. She liked Mrs. Groom, mending linen in her room, and intent on a darn, whilst a sunbeam stole down her brown face and vigorous forehead. She liked the farmyard, and Pataud, and the forest too—that ancient forest, solemn and green, with its endless avenues; but then the retrospect ended in a sudden blank, cold and bare.

“He has forgotten me,” she thought—“they have all forgotten me!” And the northern landscape faded away, and the bright blue bay and Vesuvius returned; and Silvia found herself with her hand on the latch of the door, as if she had suddenly come back from another world. It seemed, indeed, as if that one year had been isolated in her life, equally distinct from what went before as from what followed. The intercourse between her and Madame de l'Epine, broken by her own act, had never been renewed. But for a solitary letter of Mrs. Barton's, Silvia would have learned nothing of the people amongst whom she had known some joys, and felt such keen sorrows. Even as it was, that letter had not told her much of what she most cared to learn.

“Of course you have heard that Lady John has married Professor Smith,” said the letter. “As if I should hear that here!” thought Silvia, with a little sigh. “Indeed,” continued the letter, “we have been very bridal of late. What do you think of Mr. Lovell making a Mrs. Lovell of that little Georgie, whom he

was always scolding for talking slang! It seems that, when he proposed to her, she burst into tears, and promised to be so good! Miss Gray, too, has married a Mr. Johnson; and one of the Raymonds is Mrs. Grant now. She was a very sweet girl, was Ellen Raymond," &c., &c.

A good deal more Mrs. Barton said, but she did not mention Madame de l'Epine's name—she did not say one word of Madame de l'Epine's brother. Yet that letter, brief and incomplete though it was, filled Silvia with the fondest and brightest hopes. She thought that once Mr. Lovell was married, Mr. Meredith would remember her, and forgive her; but Mr. Meredith gave no sign. Weeks, months, and a whole year passed away, and Silvia thought, "He has forgotten me." And whenever memory took her back to the past, that thought was the conclusion—the *finis* which ended the little tale of her youth.

"Yes, that is the end," she thought, opening the door—"that is the end!" And opening the door as she thought so, and going down a step into the cool dark room, where a green light stole in on the stone floor through the half-closed shutters, she found herself face to face with Mr. Meredith.

If he had not been coming at last, this story would never have been written. If this young girl's faults and follies had been merely punished by Providence, and not tenderly forgiven in the end, we would have let them be. But Silvia had had a Fairy for her god-mother, and she had not been made joyous that sorrow should claim her for her own. At first she stood still, in a trance of glad surprise; then, in the joy of her heart, she cried:

"Ah! you have not forgotten me, after all."

"I could not come sooner," he replied, looking as radiant as Silvia, "and I would not write."

"And Joséphine," said Silvia, with a shy, wistful look around her, "where is she?"

"In Naples, with the Captain. I would come here alone. My sister is a widow now. Her husband lost his life in attempting to save a drowning man's. It was a generous death, and has atoned for much."

Silvia heard, but was not sure that she understood him rightly.

"You are sure you are not angry with me?" she said.

"Was I ever angry?" he asked, rather sadly.

"Oh! you looked so—so cold, that you froze me."

Mr. Meredith reddened with the memory of a by-gone pain.

"Do you think I wanted Mr. Lovell's wife that was to be to think that I cared for her?" he asked.

Silvia blushed and hung her head; but she soon raised it again, and though there were tears in her eyes, she said, saucily enough:

"Mrs. Groom was right; men are such cheats—such cheats! And how is Mrs. Groom, Mr. Meredith, and how is Pataud?"

Mrs. Groom was well, and her Philip was well, and had mended his ways, and Pataud was as ill-tempered as ever. But if Mrs. Groom thought men such cheats, what did the Principessa think of girls, when, hearing a sound of voices, she came down? And what did Dom Sabino conclude of the teaching of experience, when, being summoned by Maria Laura, he came in, and learned Mr. Meredith's errand?

A second time the bird was faithless—a second time the bird was leaving its cage! This time for ever! There was no help for it.

“It is so, and it has always been so, and it will always be so!” said Dom Sabino, when Silvia went from them at last.

The Principessa, who had had a bad husband, shook her head, turned up her eyes, and hoped it would all end well. Madame de l’Epine expressed no hope, for she had no fear.

“Perhaps Providence will give them the share of happiness that ought to have been mine,” she thought, a little sadly.

Her father, who was again as well as ever, expressed himself very shrewdly on the subject.

“Bless you, I knew all along what was coming, for all they made believe to be such enemies. I knew it! Trust to me for all that sort of thing. Why, child, I knew when Louis gave you that rose! Ah! poor Louis! you see I was not mistaken about him; he was only a little wild, but a generous fellow—a generous fellow!” said the Captain, whose eyes were full of tears, and whose heart will be full of trust and faith till he dies!

THE END.

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THE END.



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Silvia

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